

A PORTRAIT OF A RISEN CHURCH

An exposition of Colossians 3:1-17
at West Hills San Jose on March 21, 2021

PASTORAL PRAYER: God Almighty, Father, Son, Spirit, hallowed be your name. Before all things... You lived, by Your power are all things sustained, and for Your glory were all things made, we praise You. We praise you because of how great You are, and we praise You for the great things You have done. Our souls bless you Lord because we forget not all your benefits.

We praise You Lord Jesus for coming into the world to save us. For taking on flesh and dwelling among us and revealing to us the grace and truth of the Father. We thank you for your miracles and even more for your words of truth, that cut through the facades of sin and pride, that blaze in the darkness of hopelessness and despair giving life and light to souls innumerable across the ages. But most of all we thank you Lord Jesus for your holy life, your willing suffering, your good confession, your atoning death, your humble burial, your days in the grave, and your resurrection life that overcame the power of the grave. We thank you for the victorious triumph over the powers and principalities of this world, for the mission to make you known everywhere for the joy of all people, we thank you for the gift of the Holy Spirit whom you sent, and His empowering work in our midst. We thank you Lord Jesus for ascending to the Father and sitting down at His right hand to intercede for us in sympathy and steadfast love. We thank you that all that glory we just thanked you for, that that's not even the end of the story. We thank you that you are coming again for judgement and salvation. You are coming in wrath against all those who remain in love with their sin and will not turn to You and be saved. Let us all tremble in fear. And yet you are bringing a glorious salvation to all those who have loved and waited for you, all who have loved your appearing.

Help us to hear your Words now and to be changed. Help us to hear what you have said and to receive it with joy. Grant us a renewed perspective on our lives and on our relationships in this church, grant us joy in the inheritance we have, grant us power to live lives of humble sacrificial love and mercy for the glory of Christ's name. Amen.

PROBLEM: Well grace and peace church family, friends and visitors, as always it is my joy and privilege, and honor before God to be here. This morning we are going to take a step back in Colossians 3, and ask a really important question. What is a NT church supposed to look like? Or what does this snapshot in Colossians show us about what a NT church looks like? And the reason I want to look at this question is because I think how you answer it will inform your perspective in a significant way about what you should be looking for or expecting when you begin attending a local church body.

I've noticed over the years that people come to church with all kinds of different expectations. Is church a place where you got to be entertained, like a show. Where you are mostly passive and all the value you derive, or what makes going to church desirable is what is sort of given to you as a passive recipient? Is church a place you go to be inspired to be a better person? IS it desirable because it functions like a moral compass that sort of continually reminds you of where true north is? Is it a place you take your kids so that they learn good from bad and right from wrong? Or maybe it's a place you go when you are lonely and seeking relationships?

It's desirable because there are usually nice people there who do lots of social things. These are many of the reasons someone may visit a church, but these are not the primary things you are meant to find and experience in a Christian congregation. Though some of those things do happen at church and are goods that come with church life.

But if you could take a picture of the christian church in Colossae, the church that Paul has written this letter to, what would it look like? Like if I had a physical photo that I could project up on this screen behind me, what would you see? You would not see a tidy, shiny, polished, and smiling picture of a bunch of perfect people who are all put together and get along perfectly all the time. You would see a picture of a bunch of imperfect people, all of whom are just beginning to learn how to fight their sins, and lay aside old prejudices. You would see a group of people comprised of all kinds of different social, political, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds trying to learn to love and forgive and trust one another. You would see the faces of people who probably get teased or scorned by their families and coworkers for hanging out with the other members of the church. You would see an imperfect family, striving together to love and forgive and help one another because of the gospel of Jesus. You would see something messy but desirable. You would see something difficult but beautiful. You would see an impossible to explain communion of people, among which God was powerfully at work. Which brings me to my main point today

MAIN POINT: What makes the church beautiful is Christ, so love Him through worship, community and mission.

SETTING THE CONTEXT: Please open your bibles to Colossians chapter 3. As I said today is not going to be a word by word exposition of the first 17 verses of chapter 3 as we just spent the last few months doing that. The goal today is to try and look at 3:1-17 and put it all together and to see the forest. I want to see and consider the big picture with you for our joy. Now, to quickly put this text in it's context, one of Paul's converts in the last several years and gone to Colossae and planted a small church. The church had never met or seen Paul, but they have heard and believed the gospel and are learning how to flesh out it's implications for all of life. But as the church was growing, false teachers had come along and were attempting to offer them alternative paths to full inclusion into the people of God. They were preaching membership through circumcision, and wisdom and sanctification through humanly authored ideas about holiness. To which Paul has forcefully responded in chapter 2. And in chapter 3, Paul reminds the church, about what it means to follow Christ as a church community. Let's humble and open our hearts:

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

[5] Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. [6] On account of these the wrath of God is coming. [7] In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. [8] But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. [9] Do not

lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices [10] and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. [11] Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

[12] Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, [13] bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. [14] And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. [15] And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. [16] Let 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. [17] And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (ESV)

PRAYER: Help us to hear the Scripture, as your very Words to us, and help us to respond in obedience and love. In Christ's name, Amen.

ROAD MAP: Today we are going to look at 4 things, we are going to look at 1) how Christ makes the church beautiful through Worship, 2) how He makes it beautiful through community, 3) how Christ is the glory of mission, 4) how we should respond to this snapshot of the church.

WORSHIP

1. So let's jump right in. Paul starts with if then...which of course reminds us that Paul has just laid out a ton of gospel reality. If then Colossians 2 is true of you, then Colossians 3. If you have received Christ Jesus the Lord and are being built up in Him and established in the faith then chapter 3. IF you have been circumcised with a circumcision made without hands then chap 3.
2. If you have been buried with him in baptism and raised and made alive together with him through his resurrection, if He has forgiven your trespasses and canceled the record of death that stood against you nailing it to the cross, and on your behalf disarmed the rulers and authorities...THEN chapter 3. So in other words...if you are Christ's, if you have put your faith in Him, and have been baptized in His name and are seeking to walk in His ways as a part of His body the church...then do chapter 3. Colossians chapter 3 is a snap shot it's a portrait of God's risen people, His saints, His children who live together under His fatherhood and Christ's Lordship.
3. If chapter 2 is true of you, then seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, NOT on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.
4. One of the keys to understanding this text in my view is understanding the WORD SET YOUR MINDS on things above in verse 2. In greek the word means to focus on, to direct your ultimate attention and affection towards, things above. It's not saying, only think about

life above, NEVER think about life on earth. It would be impossible to obey verse 5, if that was the case.

5. When you do the greek word to set your mind on something, it means you orient your life by it. It becomes YOUR MIND SET. And your mind-set guides and governs everything else you do. We all have a mindset about life, it's just a question of what our mind-set is oriented by. What are you trying to do in life? Have fun? Find a spouse? Make money? Give your children a good life. Set yourself up for a stress free retirement? These are all fine things to strive for, but they are not meant to be the central thing that governs your life. They are not meant to be things that orient your life around.
6. **You are supposed to orient your life around things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, not around things on earth.** That is to love and value and prize created things OVER the Creator. I recently read through the 14th century century poem by Dante called the Divine Comedy. And it is a fascinating piece of literature in that it offers profound insight into human sin and divine justice. And there is a part of the poem where Dante passes a group of people in chains. And we have seen all kinds of people undergoing all kinds of different punishments up to this point of the poem. But this is new. And for these people their chains are forcing them to look at the ground and preventing them from looking up or looking around at anyone or anything else.
 1. And as Dante does throughout the poem, he stops and asks them, why are you chained up like this? And they answer him, "For as our eyes were never raised on high but fixed themselves upon the things of earth, here justice humbles them to touch the ground." Greed they say quenched the love we should have had for God, and so justice holds us here to basically punish us for living our whole lives fixated on the things of earth. IN other words, their punishment, for fixating on the things of earth...was to give them things of earth forever, and to finally remove their ability to enjoy anything or anyone else.
 2. On the other hand, if they would have let the love for God be the thing that oriented their whole life, they would have not only received God but everything else with Him. C.S. Lewis was talking about this in his collected letters, and he said it this way "If you put first things first, you get the second things thrown in. Put the second things first, and you lose both first and second things.
7. Here at the beginning of chapter 3, Paul makes the point that your priorities, values, the anchor point of your life and decision making is meant to be heaven, where Christ is, seated at God's right hand. This is meant to be our mindset.
8. And what is remarkable and perhaps easy to miss, is that what Paul is saying is that Jesus Christ is so good, so holy, so loving, so beautiful, that you should orient your entire life around Him. Jesus is so amazing, and life-giving, and faith-sustaining, and culture creating...that if you will literally just make a point to spend time thinking about Him, He will change your entire life.
9. And I think it's important to clarify what I literally mean by that. Let me tell you something that I have physically seen with my eyes in others or experienced in my own life. If you will set your mind on Christ, and worship Him as the Lord of all...you will begin to understand what it means to be truly loved. Truly. Not imperfectly, by another human being. I mean

loved with the force of a thousand suns. I mean loved with the purity of a fresh morning dew, or newly fallen snow. If you will set your mind on him...you will begin to experience love as it was truly meant to be.

1. If you set your mind on Him, You will begin to understand what it means to be actually accepted. Truly accepted, and wanted. If you will set your minds on things above where Christ is, you will begin to see how all of the bad things that have happened in the past... all of your wounds and sorrows...are not only being redeemed...but are forming in you the ability to be a life-giving servant to others who have suffered as you have.
2. If you will set your mind on Him...He will give you rest. I don't know why I've spent so much of my life worrying. When I go to Him and say...I don't know what's going to happen. I'm really concerned about this. I look to Him, I recognize that He sees the future...and He isn't worried at all.
10. Here is what I'm saying...when we focus on Him, when we WORSHIP Him, when we resolve to orient our lives around Him, He begins to change us. Christ begins to transform us into a people loved, accepted and at rest. He begins to transform us into a people that no longer live for the praise of man, for the insecurity of riches, for the always changing standards of acceptance in our culture. We become a people deeply rooted in an eternal love, empowered by grace to live lives in the imitation of Him.
11. Because Christ is so beautiful, and so amazing, and so full of life and grace and truth...that worshipping Him literally beautifies us. He is the beauty of the church's worship, and worshipping Him makes the church more beautiful. Do any of us do this perfectly? No. But by God's gracious power we are enabled to strive for it.
12. So here is snapshot one of a risen church. We become a people who orient our lives around Him. Our mindset is anchored to heaven where Christ is seated at the right hand of the father, and we are expectantly waiting for Him to come again that we might share in His glory. If we have been raised with Christ, than each of us as individuals and all of us together as a community are striving to orient our whole lives around the heart of the risen and living Jesus, to honor Him, to glorify Him and to think about what would please Him in all things.
And in doing so, the beautiful Christ, makes the worshipping church, more like Himself...beautiful.
13. Let's now look at snapshot number 2. And consider the beauty of Christ in christian community.

COMMUNITY

1. When you get to verse 5, it feels a little bit like you are getting your head pulled down out of the clouds and back into the reality of our present warfare. But if you look at the whole picture of verses 5-16, you see a description of a really diverse church family, striving to pursue Christ-likeness together. When you begin focusing on Christ together in worship... you are immediately confronted with moral ramifications.
2. Verse 5 there are things in our hearts that must be put to death. In verse 12 there are some virtues that we are called to cultivate. We are called into this pattern of life both as individuals and as a community.

1. Because in verse 6 the wrath of God is coming on account of sin. We ought to kill the sin that remains in us with all of our strength and vigor by the Spirit's power. Because God hates sin, and we love God...we should hate sin. If we want to be like Christ, we not only love what HE loves, we also hate what He hates. And God hates sin. And not just sin in general, he lists specific things. Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness. He hates anger, and wrath and malice and slander and obscene talk from your mouth.
2. Why did Paul feel the need to elaborate on the command to put to death what is earthly? Why did He feel the need to include a list? Did he offer a list because Christians DON'T struggle with these things, or because they do? If I was in jail for preaching the gospel, and I wanted to send you, our church a letter exhorting to holiness. I wouldn't tell you to fight the temptation to steal one another's corn, or to covet one another's donkeys. Because that isn't the kind of thing that you struggle with. I would tell you to not worry or be anxious for my life or your own. I would tell you to not stop meeting out of fear. I would tell you to not hide the gospel under a basket but keep bearing witness for the glory of God. Because those are probably going to be the things that are relevant for many of you.
3. What am I saying...I'm saying that in the early church...people struggled with the exact same things that we do. Don't be sexually immoral, don't allow impure thoughts into your mind or heart, don't gossip about each other, don't be mean to each other. Don't covet. Don't joke around about ugly sinful things. Instead reckon yourself dead to those things. You are not that kind of person anymore. You have put on the new verse 10. Here is where you see the beauty of it all.
4. You, broken group of people, who have come together as a refugee community fleeing your former life of sin and seeking refuge in the kingdom of God...you put on new citizenship... as GOD HIMSELF renews you, put on the new as God does the work of renewal in your life to transform you into something beautiful. As you know your Creator more and more, you will become more and more like Him. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your creator. And who is the TRUE IMAGE or the perfect image of the creator? The Lord Jesus Christ. He is THE IMAGE OF THE INVISIBLE GOD and the first born of all creation.
5. As you worship Christ, and try to fight sin together...God is doing a powerful renewing work to make you more like Christ, both in you individually and us corporately. And God's ability to shape you into something beautiful, is more powerful and more potent than any ethnic hostility or tribal animosity that may have existed before you experienced the gospel.
6. How do you undo generations of animosity in human hearts. How do you undo centuries of socially cultivated antagonism between peoples? How do you get Greeks and Jews, not just in the same room, but to sit down and have a meal together...something that Jews and Greeks NEVER DID, out of principle.
7. HOW? God's way of doing this is to renew your heart to value Christ most of all, verse 11. Ethnic and socio-political barriers break down when Christ is all. When Christ is most desirable, the thing of greatest beauty to us, we will want Him more than we want any other thing. And when that is true, you will look around at former enemies, and see Christ in

them...and love them as you have been loved. ALIEN ILLUSTRATION, you are not my enemy...sin is my enemy, the aliens are the enemy.

8. If we could take a snapshot of the church in Colossae, you would probably see people from every category Paul mentions here in verse 11. Greeks, Jews, circumcised, uncircumcised, barbarians, scythians, slaves and free men. Standing uncomfortably side by side. Some of them hugging. Some of them not quite able to hug yet. You would see something messy, but at the same time something beautiful. Enemies of God become God's friends. And as a result the friends of God become reconciled to their enemies.
9. When Christ is most important to everyone, and in everyone, you begin to witness community as it was meant to be. And in this context where Christ is in all of us, and most important to all of us, we are called to become a community that has compassion for each other. That is kind to one another verse 12. That is humble and meek and patient with each other. Now why does he offer this list? Does he enumerate these things because they are natural?
 1. No he enumerates this list, because these things are the fruit of the supernatural. God through the gospel creates these attitudes among enemies, by His own life-giving love.
 2. If we were looking at a picture of the NT church, we would see the faces of people who have had to bear with one another in verse 13 and who have had to forgive one another as the Lord had forgiven them.
10. And yet Paul is perfectly content, to call this messy church to God's ideal. Be a community that forgives and puts on love above all else. Be a community where the peace of Christ rules over all your hearts. Be a family that values the gospel and seeks to internalize it in abundance. Be a family that rejoices together in songs of thankfulness. And as we as a church value Christ more and more, we becomes more and more like Him in the way we relate to one another, because of His powerful renewing work.
11. So Christ not only beautifies how we live before Him in worship, He also beautifies how we relate to one another as a family. He takes something broken and tangled and messy, and brings renewal, and change and glory. This is risen church. Let's now look at our final snapshot of a NT church, and how Christ is the glory or the beauty of our mission

MISSION

1. Paul's big overarching statement in verse 17 is in whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him. Now how might that relate to the church's mission?
2. Well Paul has just described how we ought to worship, and how we ought to relate to one another. How we are to anchor our mindset in heaven where Christ is, how we ought to love Christ above all things, and then turn and love those in whom He dwells. And then here he says and in everything and in all things, whether in speech or deed, do everything in His name. Immediately following these words he going to give two examples of what that looks like. The first is what this looks like in the home and the second is what it looks like at the workplace.
3. And when you take a step back and think about the context...this is a church of new believers. And the gospel has only just recently come to Colossae. New converts may not be

going home to a christian family. New converts are probably not going back to a christian workplace. I think Paul is saying, is let your mind set be shaped by Jesus, come together as a community to help each other fight sin and grow in holiness, and then let those things inform how you engage all of the rest of your life.

4. When you go home, love your spouse, or your parents or your roommates, in the name of the Lord Jesus. When you go to work, work for the Lord Jesus. If you are someone's boss, remember that you have a boss in heaven. When you go to work, when you walk the dog, and mow the lawn do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus. When you leave corporate worship and go back to your normal life, go back with the question "how can I do THIS (whatever you are doing) in a way that reflects the character and nature of God." How can I do THIS as Christ's representative.
5. At our church we prioritize verbal evangelism to the lost as the cornerstone of mission and that is correct...everything begins there and flows from there. But our mission begins and flows out of that. That isn't the whole picture. When Christ gave the great commission in Matthew 28, he didn't say evangelize and then your done. He said "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."
6. What percentage of that call does verbal evangelism to the lost consist of? It's just the beginning right? We want to see people saved...AND ALSO become disciples who are baptized in Christ's name and who obey all that He has commanded them for their entire life.
7. Our mission in this text is to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, which means bring the gospel everywhere...and INTO everything.
 1. I want to tell my neighbors about the Lord Jesus with my words, and I want to show my neighbors something of the Lord Jesus in how I act and relate to them. I want to share the gospel with them, as well as pick up their trash can that fell over and spilled onto the street.
 2. Our goal is to do EVERYTHING, whether word or deed as Christ's representatives, and in His name. We want to bring the gospel everywhere to everyone, and we want to bring the gospel to bear on every aspect of our lives. And as we do this, Christ is magnified and glorified. As we do this, Christ is glorified in us, and we in Him. As we prize Him most of all in all things...His gospel becomes more beautiful to us, and more beautiful to others.

And so this is a picture of a risen Church. It's a group of people who are not beautiful in themselves. Apart from Christ the church would become very ugly very quickly. But what makes the church beautiful is Christ Jesus. When He is worshipped, and functions as the center of life and community. When His people are seeking to exalt Him in all that they do, beauty shines forth in absolute glory. Has any church, anywhere, ever done this perfectly. I highly doubt it. But this is what we are called to do...to treasure Christ...to love one another...and to seek to bring the Lordship of Jesus to bear on every domain of our lives. And when God is doing this among us, the beauty of Christ is made visible to all. Let's now close with a few very brief suggestions about how to respond to what you just heard.

HOW WE SHOULD RESPOND

1. You should come to church seeking Christ. Christ is what makes a church beautiful, and where He is present and living among the members, you will find life and help and encouragement for your soul. When I leave church, the question I try to ask myself is not... how did everyone else do in worship today. How was the music, how were the various meditations and the sermon. I ask, how did I DO worshipping my Lord this morning, since I was coming to seek Him.
2. If this is what risen church actually is, then we should be patient with each other. The way God deals with messiness in the church is not by fixing the other person...it's by helping you learn to treasure Christ more in whatever happens. In the risen church, God is going to teach you to forgive as He forgave. And what precedes forgiveness? Sin. Hurtful comments. Ungodly behavior in a moment of moral weakness. That happens in the risen church...so that God can make all of us more like Christ. So be patient and compassionate toward each other.
3. Rejoice. Be happy. Give thanks. The Spirit is making us more and more into a community like this EVERY DAY, even when you can't see it. Why, because we are doing such a good job? No. Because His Son Jesus died for our sins so that we can become a new creation through faith. And He HIMSELF is actively at work renewing us into the image of God. Rejoice!
4. Finally ask yourself...how am I doing at worshipping my God? How am I doing at participating in the life of the body of Christ? How am I doing at bringing the reality of Christ's Lordship into every area of my life? How am I doing about using my words and my deeds in the name of the Lord Jesus? I'm sure there are probably ways you are doing this well, and there are probably areas of your life where this needs to grow. And where you see deficiencies, don't justify them. Repent for your weakness...and come and touch and taste the compassion of God at these tables.

We on our own are not what makes the church beautiful, Christ working in us is what displays His beauty to the world. And He wants to help us and shape us into something beautiful, something that looks like Him.

What makes the church beautiful is Christ, so love Him through worship, community and mission.

COMMUNION: IT is now time for communion where we are invited to draw near to Christ through faith. These symbols of bread and wine are pictures through which we are invited to taste and experience the reality. This bread is bread. But it represents something real and physical, that we are invited to contemplate as we eat. This wine is wine, and yet is was given to us by Christ Himself to touch and taste so that we might arouse a vivid sense of the reality that it represents. That Christ really did die for you, that Christ really did shed His blood for you...and He did this to reconcile you to God, and to bring you into rich and abundant fellowship with Himself.

Call and response: 1 Peter 3:18

What has Christ done? Christ has suffered once for sins

In what way did Christ suffer for sin? as the righteous for the unrighteous

And why did Christ do this? that He might bring us to God. Here is all our hope and peace.