Overcoming The Lesser Life — Delivery Transcript

Colossians 3:1–4 (ESV) · Wes Terry · Sunday, April 16, 2017 · *Greater*

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And today's a really big day for us, for our West Campus, not just because of Multiply Bless the West, but also because of a new series that we're launching and we're not calling it a series, we're actually calling it a spiritual growth campaign. And today we're kicking it off. The name of the spiritual growth campaign is Greater: Overcoming the Lesser Life. And for a lot of us, when we hear the word greater, maybe the first thing that comes to our mind is something like strength or power, something along those lines.

And the word greater itself kind of implies this idea that what is is not as good as what could be. It's kind of not wrong for us as human beings to crave something better than what we have right now. A guy named Blaise Pascal, he's actually the guy after whom I named my son Blaise. He talked about this urge for more in terms of deposed royalty. He said as human beings we are deposed royalty. We have this sense that we've fallen from a throne. And that throne from which we've fallen is being people who are created in God's image.

We were perfectly created in that image, but as a result of the fall, that image has kind of been torn and messed up, and therefore we as human beings have this idea that what is is not as good as what could be. And we have this yearning to be better, to be greater. That's something that was given to us by God. But that greater life is only going to be found through the Lord Jesus Christ. At least that's what Christianity teaches. But if we're honest, even though some of us might think of words like resurrection with the word greater, maybe you think of the word gospel with the word greater.

But for most people in our culture, most people in our culture, when they hear words like Jesus or gospel or resurrection or any of that stuff, they might think of religious, small-minded, judgmental, mean, restrictive, any number of those things. And I'm not judging them for that or saying that's necessarily wrong. That's just what comes to their mind. And even for some Christians, while they wouldn't say those kinds of things, there is this idea for

a lot of people that what we talk about on Sunday, you know, the Jesus stuff. That kind of belongs in the Sunday box and the rest of my life, my real life, it belongs in another box.

And philosophers call this the sacred secular split. That as human beings, we have a tendency to take our sacred life, our religious beliefs, beliefs about God and things like that, and we kind of put it in this sacred box and the sacred box is things you believe by faith. It's the things you can't prove. It's the things you kind of lean on as a crutch. They're private, privately held. They don't have anything to do with your public life or anything like that. That's your sacred sphere. And then once you're done with your sacred sphere, you kind of hop out of there and you go to your secular sphere, the work world, your day-to-day life, your nine-to-five, you know, who you marry, what you do in the workplace, strategic networking, all those kinds of things.

And whether we admit it or not, for many Christians today, because this is just part of our culture, this is the way our culture thinks. We kind of have this idea that if we're going to win in life, if we're going to experience the greater life, then it's not going to come from our Sunday box, it's going to come from our real-world box. And so we need to make better decisions, we need to get more strategic relationships, we need— I should have picked a better woman to marry, a better man to marry, whatever the case may be.

I should have got a different job, different education. And what we're going to find, hopefully, what I'm going to be able to show you over the next couple of weeks, is that the greater life isn't found by separating those two worlds. And it's certainly not found by trying to pursue the greater life in things like your work or your family or your marriage. Those things are wonderful things, but they're certainly not ultimate things and they're not things that are going to position you to experience the greater life. The greater life is found only and always in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And just think: Easter, right? We celebrate the resurrection. If God really did raise Jesus from the dead, which I think you can make a case that he did. Even if you took away the Bible and just look at it historically, look at the evidence historically, not presupposing anything's inspired. If you just take the facts of history that Jesus was crucified by the Romans, almost everybody agrees on that. And that he was buried. He was buried in a tomb rented by Joseph of Arimathea. That's documented historically outside the Gospels. And that his disciples sincerely came to believe that he was genuinely risen from the dead.

And not only did they believe it, but they preached it so much so that they lost their lives for it. I mean, and they lost their lives in a bad way, getting crucified upside down, getting stoned, beaten. And not one of them recanted because they sincerely believed that they physically saw Jesus risen from the dead. And not only did his followers believe that, but even people who weren't followers, people like the Apostle Paul, who before he was Paul was

Saul of Tarsus, enemies of the faith, guys like James, the brother of Jesus, who didn't used to be a Christian.

He became a Christian. Why? Because he says, I saw Jesus risen from the dead. And again, you don't have to believe the Bible's inspired to get those facts. Those are all attested elsewhere in history. Multiple attestation is what historians call it. There's a good case that God raised Jesus from the dead. That's the most reasonable explanation in light of the evidence. And if he did raise Jesus from the dead, then that means the separation between sacred and secular has been destroyed. It's abolished. There is no private spiritual sphere and then public social sphere.

Those spheres can't exist. We're integrated wholesale. And if you're a Christian whatsoever, you know that the immaterial in Christ became material. The invisible God became visible. The spiritual became physical. And that Christ, if you believe in Christianity, left heaven, came to earth, entered the real world, lived a real life, and died a real death in space-time history. It's a historical event. Christianity is not just a set of ideas. It's not just a philosophy. It's not just a moral approach to life. It's a circumstance, it's an event, it's a historical event, namely that Jesus of Nazareth was crucified by the Romans, and three days later God raised him from the dead.

And if that's true, if it historically happened, then that means there can't be a separation between the sacred and the secular. And that your faith in Christ should influence all of your life, your Sunday and Monday, Tuesday and the rest of the week, that your faith in Christ should influence the way you look at economics and politics and marriage and strategic networking and your workplace and all of those things in life and that the degree to which you bring the truth of the gospel, the power and the victory of the resurrection, the degree to which you bring that to bear on your day-to-day life, it is to that degree that you'll actually start winning in those key environments.

You'll start living the greater life. That's what we're going to look at over the next couple of weeks. And our key text for the next couple of weeks is going to be Colossians chapters 3 and 4. This morning we're going to be in Colossians chapter 3, verses 1 to 4. And I mentioned him just a little bit. This letter was actually written by a guy, the Apostle Paul. And he used to be called Saul of Tarsus. He was a committed Jew. He was a Pharisee of Pharisees. He was a religious leader.

He used to hate Christians, tried to wipe the Christian movement off the face of the earth. But according to his telling of the story, he was taking a trip to Damascus and the risen Lord Jesus Christ appeared to him told him to quit kicking against the goads, to join the cause, and Paul repented of his sins and trusted in Christ for salvation and went from being the most ardent persecutor of the church to one of the most successful church planters the church has ever seen. He planted churches all over the known world, and not only did he

plant churches all over the known world, he would disciple people, train leaders, multiply his life into their life, and then they would go out and plant churches.

And one of his leaders planted a church in a place called the Lycus Valley.[1] One of those communities was a place called Colossae, and the church that this letter is written to is a church in Colossae. And the reason Paul's writing this letter is because there was a group of people in that church, false teachers, who were basically saying Jesus is great, but he's not enough. Grace is good. You know, have your private faith, that's wonderful. But if you're really going to win in life, if you really want to succeed, if you really want to have a relationship with God, then you need a certain diet, you need a certain approach to life, you need certain relationships, etc., etc.

Similar kind of thing gets told to us today. It's that sacred-secular split. Hey, if you want to go to church, that's wonderful. But if you really want to win in life, you know, Cosmopolitan magazine or whatever men's magazine, women's magazine— got to have a certain kind of diet, got to have a certain approach to life, got to do this, got to do that. And what Paul writes to the Colossians is that's actually false. That Jesus is not just great, but he is the greatest. He's not just high. He's the highest.

He's superior and supreme over everything else. And the degree to which you get that truth into your life, the degree to which you take that heavenly truth of the gospel and work it into your psychology and the way you approach your day-to-day life, it is to that degree that you're going to win, that you're going to experience the greater life. And he develops that for the first couple of chapters. And then when we get to chapter three, he really starts drilling it down into your day-to-day, workaday world. And in the series, we're actually going to look at four key environments.

We're not going to do this today, but over the next six weeks we're going to look at environments like your marriage, your relationship between the husband and a wife, your family, the relationships between parents and children. The relationship that you have with your work and your workplace and then your relationship just generally with the world. We're going to see how to experience the greater life in those key environments. But before Paul starts talking about the details of those four relational environments, he basically gives us the main idea. And the main idea is that until you get your mind up in the heavens and get heaven up in your mind, you're not going to produce much earthly good, which is the exact opposite of what our culture says.

The advice that Paul gives in this text is counterintuitive. Okay, I'm going to go right out and say that. It's not popular, it's something that our culture says is nonsense. We have a saying in our culture that says people who are too heavenly minded are no earthly good. And the reason we think that is because we think of heavenly-minded people as kind of out of touch with reality, right? They're kind of up in the clouds, they're kind of, ooh, super spiritual.

They make you nervous when you're around them. You don't want to— am I reading anybody's mail?

I'm kind of wired like this. I'm like, I don't want to be around those people. But that's not heavenly mindedness. Paul's going to give us a different definition of heavenly mindedness, number one. And then number two, he's going to show us that the degree to which we do get our minds up in the heavens, it is to that degree that heaven's going to come down to earth and produce good in our life produce the greater life in your marriage, with your kids, in your workplace and the different spheres that he's going to apply this truth to.

So let's read the text. It asks, what does it mean to be heavenly minded? And then why is that, why would that impact our lives so dramatically? So Colossians chapter 3, we're going to start in verse 1. Paul says, "If then you have been raised with Christ"— or maybe you have a translation that says, since you've been raised; it's an established fact. Since this is true of you in Christ, since you've been raised— "seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above"— or maybe it says set your heart on the things that are above— "not on things that are on earth.

For"— or since— "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." So the first thing we got to do if we're going to understand the text is to understand what does it mean to be heavenly minded, to seek the things that are above. What does that mean? Because it doesn't mean what we might think it means. It doesn't mean to sit around and daydream about heaven all day— not that that's necessarily wrong— but that's not what Paul's talking about.

He's not saying you sit around and think about how nice the food's going to taste and how awesome the parties are going to be. The music's going to be so great and I'm going to hear acoustic music all day long every day or heavy metal or whatever you like. The streets are going to be gold and it's going to be fluffy clouds— or that's actually not true— but maybe you're daydreaming that and you're thinking of all these wonderful things, and I'm going to have this awesome body, not going to have any fat, I'm going to be so precise.

And that's again, I guess you could do that, but that's not what Paul's talking about. He's not saying daydream about heaven. The clue, the way you know that's not what he's talking about, those two little words. If then, or a better translation is since then. This is established truth. You see it again in verse three. He'll say for you've died, or since you've died with Christ. He's saying there are some truths about reality as a Christian person you need to get your head around. Namely, you've been raised with Christ and you've died with Christ.

You've died with Christ in his death. You've been raised with Christ in his resurrection. That as a Christian person, yeah, heaven's nice someday if you want to daydream about it, but that's in the future. What's true right now is you're in Christ. What's true of Jesus is now true

of you. And you need to get your head around that. And the degree to which you get your head around that truth, it is to that degree that you're going to live the greater life, that you're going to start winning in marriage and parenting and all those other things.

Which is kind of counterintuitive. Look at what he says. He says, you've been raised, past tense. Verse 3, he says, you have died. Your life is hidden with Christ in God. What's he talking about? You might think of Christianity as teaching that we're going to be raised future someday. You know, when we go to heaven, it'll be a resurrection, glorification, all that stuff. That's true, that Christianity does teach that, but it doesn't only teach that. There's a sense in which the moment you become a Christian, the moment you unite yourself to Christ by faith, so you understand I'm a sinner separated from God.

I need Christ to save me. You call on the name of the Lord to be saved. And that moment when you put faith in Jesus, in an instant you die with Christ, you're raised with Christ. In an instant you're united like this, just like that. Paul says it this way in Galatians 2:20: "I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."

So Paul no longer identifies his life based on who he was or who he will be in the future. He puts all that aside and he says, my life is now defined by who I am in Christ. I've died with him, I've been raised with him. Everything that's true of Jesus is now true of you if you're a Christian. Which if you kind of want to get some particulars around that, it's almost as if you're a Christian person, it's almost as if two thousand years ago you died on the cross.

You say, well, I didn't die on the cross. No, but Jesus did die on the cross, and if you're a Christian, you're in him, which means everything that was true of him is now true of you. So he paid a penalty that you could have never paid, but he paid the penalty for your sin and for the world's sin, past, present, and future. And since that's true of him, it's now true of you. The penalty of sin no longer has any sway over you. The power of sin no longer has any hold on you.

Why? Because you're all of a sudden a great person? No, but because you're united in Christ by faith. Everything that's true of him is now true of you. Somebody this week I was reading said that the essence of sin is putting yourself in the place of God, substituting yourself for God, putting yourself where only God deserves to be. Basically running your life. That's the essence of sin. And you think about sin, that's really what it is. It's wanting to be God. The essence of salvation is God putting himself where only you deserve to be, which is on the cross.

God puts himself where you belong. That's the essence of salvation. Not just that Jesus Christ died on the cross, but that Jesus Christ died in your place on the cross for your sin. And when you become a Christian, you're united with Him. Everything that becomes true of

Jesus becomes true of you. You've died his death, but you've also been raised in His resurrection. And what does that mean? We talked about the benefits of being united in his death, but the fact that we've been raised with Christ means not just that we'll have a new body someday or that we'll have eternal life someday.

It means that right now there's something true about us that used to not be true about us. You see that little phrase in verse 1, seated at the right hand of God. We don't use that language anymore, but it was basically a way of saying, if you were seated at the right hand of the king, it meant you have access with the king. Intimacy, privilege. You kind of had the ear of the king. Okay, if you wanted the king to do something for you, if you were at his right hand, then it would happen.

And Jesus is seated at the right hand of God, basically saying that Jesus has all rule, all authority, all access, all privilege, all intimacy. But you've not just died with Christ, you've been raised with him. So that means what's true of Jesus is now true of you. You have his access. You're seated at the right hand of God. You have that privilege. You have that intimacy that when God looks at you, he doesn't see your life. He sees the life of Christ. He doesn't see your moral record. He sees the sinless perfect moral record of his one and only son.

As somebody said, you are saved by works. You're just not saved by your works. You're saved by his. And that's a good thing. That's what Paul's talking about. He's saying that union, that you're in Christ, everything true of Jesus is now true of you. You've died with him. He's in your place. Everything that's true of Jesus is true of you. You've been raised with him. Get your mind around that truth, work it into your soul, get it into your psychology, bring it to bear on your day-to-day life, let that influence your marriage and the way you parent, the way you approach your work life, all of those different spheres in your life, the degree to which you bring the truth of the gospel to bear on those things is the degree to which you're going to start winning and living the greater life.

Get your head around it. Now, how do you do that? That becomes a question. And the way Paul puts it in verse 2, he says there's a positive and there's a negative. The positive is that you set your mind on the things that are above, but the negative is that you don't set your mind on the things that are on earth. So think about it this way. If you think about setting your mind on a thing, think of it in terms of getting wrapped up in something. Because we still use this language today.

We will say, wow, that girl's really wrapped up in her— what are girls wrapped up in? Wedding day. So girls get wrapped up in their wedding day. She's really wrapped up in her wedding day. What do we mean by that? We mean it's like consumed her, right? It's all she thinks about, it's all she talks about. It's become her life. Which incidentally in verse 4 is

exactly how Paul puts it. He says, when Christ, who is your life, appears. So when you're setting your mind on the things that are above, you're making it your life.

You're getting all wrapped up in it. Man, he's really wrapped up in that football team. It's become his life. It's his obsession. He's all wrapped up in his work. That's all he thinks about is his work. His work is his life. And Paul is saying, you got to watch out that you don't wrap yourself up in the things of this world, but that you wrap yourself up in the things that are in heaven where Christ is. And the things of this world, that's a pretty broad category. Notice he doesn't say don't get wrapped up in sin.

That's obvious. But he says don't get yourself wrapped up in the things of this world. Which could be good things. There's a lot of good things that we can wrap ourselves up in and they make poor masters. They were never meant to be our saviors and they'll make us miserable. The four things that Paul lists out is our marriage, our relationship with our kids, our workplace, and our friends. And just generally living in the world, the pleasures of the world. If you make your marriage your God, if you make your spouse your savior, all wrapped up in it, then the day that they upset you, the day that they fail you, the day they disappoint you, you're destroyed.

You come unraveled. Why? Because you are all wrapped up in them. Or your kids. You make your kids your life. Are kids good? Depends who you ask, when you ask them, but mostly, yeah, kids are good. But if kids become your life, if you get all wrapped up in them, and if you live your life vicariously through them and then they don't hit the home run and they don't make the playoffs. And you're secretly mad at them for it because you were living vicariously through them, and then you destroy them and you destroy yourself because they were never meant to be saviors.

They were never meant to be gods. You were never meant to wrap your life up in them. That's what Paul's warning us against. Be careful. They're things of this world, secondary things. They were never meant to be ultimate things. The third example he gives is work. And I mean, we all know the guy who gets himself wrapped up in his work, right? Or the lady. They just become consumed by it and all of a sudden their family starts to suffer, their spiritual life starts to suffer because the secondary thing became an ultimate thing, they became wrapped up in it.

And it destroyed them. And Paul's saying, set your minds on the things that are above. If you're going to wrap yourself up in something, wrap yourself up in who you are in Christ. Your identity in him. You've died with him. You've been raised with him. That's what's true of you. And if you'll live your life from that vantage point and not live your life wrapping yourself up in these secondary, albeit good things, then you'll start winning. They won't destroy you. Now how do you know what you're wrapped up in? I guess is the question.

And there's some tests that you can use. You can ask yourself questions like, what is it in my life that if I lost it, I would be totally destroyed? And there's different questions you might give to that, but really try to nail down what is it that wakes you up in the morning? What keeps you going when life gets really tough? Where is it that you go to in life for sweetness and security? What kind of gives you salvation? What makes you whole in life? Answer that question. That requires some introspection.

I get that. It requires a level of honesty that a lot of us may not be comfortable with. But if you answer that question, and if you're a Christian and you answer that question and it's anything other than your identity in Christ, anything other than Christ alone, that's a sign you've got yourself wrapped up in something other than him. And Paul's saying, unwrap yourself and wrap yourself back up in Christ. Another way you can know it, this is an easier way. If you've ever got anger in your life, just uncontrollable anger.

Anybody ever had this? Don't raise your hand. But I mean not kind of angry; really angry anger that just kind of stays with you. You wake up with the anger, you go to bed with the anger, you're just angry. Or depressed. I know there's chemical things with depression. I'm not talking about that, but just the psychology of depression, just getting super down, despondent, despairing. Nobody likes me, everybody hates me. That kind of idea. I might as well go home. That's how it goes. Despair that you just can't seem to come out of.

That's a symptom that you might be wrapped up in something other than Christ. Or fear. Here's another one where you're just— debilitating fear. I cannot move on. I can't talk to them. I can't go up for the interview. I'm just paralyzed by fear. That's a symptom. You got wrapped up in something of this world, wrapped up in something other than who you are in Christ. And the way to unwrap yourself, so there's a positive and a negative in verse 2. So you unwrap yourself from the things of this world and wrap yourself back up in Christ.

How do you do that? Essentially, it's like you're pointing your finger into the face of that anger or the fear and you're saying, you're not my life. You don't control me. I'm not who you say I am. My worth is not dependent on that job title. My value isn't dependent on whether or not my marriage is 100% awesome. And you look at it in the eye and you say, you're not my life. Christ is my life. And my value is dependent on him. My worth, my being made whole is not dependent on whether or not this thing's put together.

Being made whole for me is reminding myself and acknowledging that I'm in Christ. He's my savior. And I know that sounds kind of psychological, kind of like, is Wes the counselor here? Where's the bed? But I'm telling you this works. Just the other day, a couple of weeks ago, I was having one of those episodes. I was like all three. Anger, depression, and fear. All wrapped up in one. Anybody had that? That's pretty bad. And man I was upset and I was meditating on this text, and maybe that's why the Lord gave me this experience, but I started doing this.

I started preaching the gospel to myself. That's what I call it. And you point your finger in the face of that fear, you're not my life. It doesn't matter what you say about me, it doesn't matter what they think about me. Matters what Christ thinks about me. It's almost like you're shooting a little gospel arrow into the anti-gospel emotion. And what I found was that the emotions didn't go away. The anger was still there, but it was manageable. It wasn't debilitating anger. Still a little bit of fear, but not crippling fear.

I could move forward. I went and I had a tough conversation. You make the tough phone call. You release yourself from being controlled by what they think about you. The emotions don't go away completely, but they lose their grip. They lose their power. Do you know why? Because they're no longer your God. They're no longer your salvation. You've reminded yourself of your real Savior. And so this morning, I think what I would encourage us to do as we think about the resurrection is to remind us of what Paul's saying. Wrap yourself up in who you are in Christ.

You've died with him, he's died your death, you've died his death, you've been raised with him. What's true of him is now true of you. Don't let yourself keep getting wrapped up in the things of this world. There's good things you can wrap yourself up in. I'm not saying that you should avoid being married or having kids or having a lot of money. He's just saying don't find your identity in how much money's in your 401(k). Because here's what's going to happen. One of these days your marriage is going to be less than perfect.

And what are you going to do in that day? One of these days your kids are going to disappoint you, or you're going to disappoint them. And what's going to happen on that day? What's going to happen when the thing you were looking to make you whole fails you? You're going to fall apart. And so unwrap yourself from that thing today. Find your identity and your security and your sweetness in life from who you are in Christ and from that place love your wife and minister to your kids and work your jobs.

C. S. Lewis has a great quote on this. He says, when I love God more than my earthly dearest, I'll love my earthly dearest more than I do now. And the idea is that when we keep ultimate things ultimate, when our relationship with God is our priority, you'll find you're able to love your spouse better. Parent your kids better, enjoy your work more fully, start winning in life. You'll find you're much more successful. As Paul would put it, the more heavenly minded you become, the more earthly good you are, the more earthly good you produce.

And so unwrap yourself from the things of this world, wrap yourself back up in Christ. You love God more than your earthly dearest. You'll love your earthly dearest more than you do now. And so what I want to encourage you to do this morning, some of you this morning are not Christians. And you would say, you know, I've wrapped myself up in everything but Christ. I've tried money, didn't produce the life I wanted. I've tried sex with whoever I want to have sex with that didn't produce the life I wanted.

I've tried finding my identity in my work. I've tried finding my identity in a hundred different things, and nothing has produced the life I know I need to live. And if you find yourself in that place this morning, you're in the right place. And your solution to having the greater life, the life you wanted, is not going to be found in anything other than Christ alone. And so this morning, repent and believe. Repentance is just a change of mind and a change of heart. It's agreeing with God that I can't find my identity in those things.

I can only find it in Christ. My heart will only rest content in Him. And so repent of that other way of living and put your faith in Jesus, call on the name of the Lord and you'll be saved. And some of you may need to do that this morning. Others of us, I would say most of us in this room are Christian people. And the way you take the next step in your faith journey is the same way they do. It's repentance and faith. Some of us this morning are Christians who are all wrapped up in your work.

You're identified by it, you're all wrapped up in how you're doing in your relationship or how things are going with your kids. And I'm not saying those things shouldn't affect you. They should. But if they've become the savior, if you're wrapped up in them, then unwrap yourself and remember who you are in Christ. There's been a change of status. You're not who you were. You don't relate with yourself the same way. You don't relate with God the same way. And you don't relate with people in the same way. All that's been changed by the cross and the resurrection.

And as we sing, as Daniel will come and lead us through a song, just let the truths of the gospel wash over you, remind you of who you are in Christ. And remember that the greater life you're really wanting isn't going to be found through Cosmo magazine. It's going to be taking the spiritual truths of the gospel and bringing them to bear on your day-to-day life. And if you'll stick with us for the next couple of weeks, I am going to work really hard to try and make it super practical and easy to see exactly how the gospel transforms your relationship with your children and your life at work and all those different things.

I want to give you some real practical help, so I hope you'll stick around for that as well.

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1. Transcript note: spoken as "the Lystra Valley"; Colossae was in the Lycus River valley (with Laodicea and Hierapolis), while Lystra was a city in Lycaonia, in the province of Galatia. Source: Colossians 4:13; Acts 14:6; Encyclopaedia Britannica, "Colossae." ↩