

God's People: Raised

Westview Church | Colossians 3:1-4 | Pastor Brett Toney | April 9, 2023

Transformed By History

Before dawn on Sunday, April 5, 33 AD a commoner from a backwater town in a small Roman province rose from the dead. Three days before, he had been put to death by professional executioners on the request of religious leaders who were incensed that this man claimed to be God. This man's closest followers were so confident that he not only rose from the dead but was indeed God that they would die for that assertion. Perhaps you think those followers faked the resurrection or that Jesus didn't *really* die. Maybe someone moved his body from the original tomb or the disciples were hallucinating. But more likely, I think you would profess faith in Christ and affirm the resurrection while not seeing any bearing of it on your life. "Did Jesus rise from the dead? Sure, but I got to finish my taxes." My hope for our time this morning is that you would see in Colossians 3 that God's people are raised—we are transformed because we are bound to the risen Christ. And just as the resurrection of Jesus transfigured his disciples such that their identity was wrapped up in the person and work of Christ, I want you, Christian, to see that you were raised, that you died, and that your life is hidden.

You Were Raised (Colossians 3:1-2)

We're jumping into Colossians mid-thought here in chapter three. Paul concludes chapter two stating that rules and regulations to not interact with certain things or eat certain things or even to touch certain things—all the rules that people can come up with to try to be better or be holy—Paul says they "are of no value in stopping the indulgence of the flesh." They are of *no* value. What then is of value? We all perceive that things are not as they should be. We're well aware of our own vices and proclivities. Where can we turn? We turn to our union with Christ. "*If* then you have been raised with Christ"—if? Why would Paul assume we've been raised with

Christ? Chapter two, verse twelve—if you’re a Christian you “have been buried with [Christ] in baptism, in which you were also raised with him *through faith* in the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead.” When you believed in Christ, you were united to him such that Paul can say that you died and were raised with him. The same power by which God raised Jesus from the dead is at work in you, Church.

And look at how complete and thorough was Jesus’ resurrection. God did not raise him merely for him to die again. No, he was raised and exalted on high so that even now—yes, right now, this morning, today—Jesus “is seated at the right hand of God.” That is the place of honor and authority, seated on the throne as the proper king with all its rights and privileges. We saw last week how that authority goes with us on the mission Christ gave us. Here, that authority is brought to bear on our sanctification. If you’ve been raised with Christ, if you are united to Jesus by faith, then you have the power of the living God at work in you now. So now, you don’t have to seek after all those vain things that will never satisfy. Scrolling and scrolling, lusting after a new purse or a better home or someone who meets every fantasy—how do you stop? Budgets and boundaries and filters? You pursue and set your affections on those heavenly things that will endure for ages upon ages upon ages.

You Died (Colossians 3:3)

Or v.3, you “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” What are these heavenly things we should seek and set our minds on? What are the earthly things Paul has in mind? He tells us. Verses 5-11 describe those earthly things that should not be found among us as God’s people—sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, and more. Instead, those heavenly, enduring things of v.12 and on are what we pursue and think about—compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, patience and so on. But seeking and setting

our minds on these heavenly virtues is not a Christianized asceticism, a list of things to do. No, rather, Paul drills down again on your identity.

Because you died, you ought to put to death that which is earthly in you. Paul again has in view this profound and intimate union you have with Christ. Through faith and the inner working of the Spirit, your identity is bound up with Jesus such that when he died, you died. This is what we dwelt on Friday evening—through his sacrifice, Jesus “has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified” (Hebrews 10:14). Now, Paul mixes his metaphors here some. When he talks about Christ dying in chapter two, he says you were dead in your trespasses, 2:13. So you were dead, but you also have died. The first metaphor is to underscore your *inability* to be saved by your own effort. The second metaphor is to underscore your *ability* to no longer give yourself to those trespasses that entombed you. Listen to Paul preach this good news to you about how those trespasses were forgiven, Colossians 2:14-15, “[God cancelled] the record of debt that stood against [you] with its legal demands. This he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the rulers and authorities and put them to open shame, by triumphing over them in [Christ].” The death of Christ on the cross looks foolish. It looks like defeat. But the cross of Christ was triumph! It was victory! The power of sin is death, and death died when Christ died. And because you, Christian, are united to Christ, when he died, you died.

This is most profoundly what is true about who you *are*. You are not what you feel. You are not what you identify as. You are not what your parents say you are. You are not a diagnosis. You are not your job. You are not what you can do. You are not your skin color. You are not how you are needed. Christian, the most fundamental reality about you, about your identity, is that you are in Christ. You died with him. You have been raised with him. And you will feel bored and meaningless with your work, whether inside the home or outside, if that work is

your identity. God never intended for it to be. He redeemed you to image him through your union with Christ. Don't miss the perplexity of this. Colossians 1:15, Jesus "is the image of the invisible God." Genesis 1:26, humanity is made in the image and likeness of God to exercise his dominion. The only way that happens is if the images come together. You will not exercise dominion—you will not go about work rightly apart from union with Christ. You need to be so heavenly minded that you finally are of some earthly good. "[Setting] your minds on things that are above" isn't daydreaming about angels playing harps on clouds. It's putting to death that which is earthly in you. It's living according to your union with the risen Christ.

Your Life is Hidden (Colossians 3:3-4)

But God has done more—he's done something better than redeeming your work and giving you an identity. He's done something more than raised you in union with the reigning Lord Jesus. He has hidden your life. Kids, here's where I need your help. Let's think through this statement: when you are in Christ, "your life is hidden with Christ in God." Here's a visual I picked up from another pastor. Here you are. Paul says in Colossians 1:27, "God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." If you're a Christian, Christ is in you. How so? Colossians 2:10, "You have been filled in him." Christ is in you. You have been filled in him.

But our passage says, "Your life is hidden with Christ." You're *with* him. Or you have been filled *in him*. He's in you; you're in him. So there you go, you are in him.

But we're not done yet. "Your life is hidden with Christ *in God*." Christ is in you. You are in Christ. You are with Christ *in God*.

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things? Who shall bring any charge against God's

elect? It is God who justifies. Who is to condemn? Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or danger, or sword? As it is written, “For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.” No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present nor things to come, nor powers, nor height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Church, you are raised with Christ, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. You are kept and preserved and guarded until that day when Christ appears. You are folded into relationship with the Triune God. And nothing can prevail against you. The sin that besets you will *not* be victorious. The suffering you are enduring will *not* get the final word. The trouble that you are walking through will *not* deprive you of your eternal hope. The broken relationship you are reeling from will *not* always hurt you.

“When Christ who is your life appears”—he is your life. The resurrected Christ is the source and substance, the pounding heart and life-giving breath of your life. When that one appears, “you also will appear with him in glory.” 1 John 3:2, “What we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.” Church, glory awaits. Are you fooling about with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered you? Lewis rightly likened us to a foolish child playing with mud pies in the slums when we’re offered a vacation at the sea. Because Christ is risen, and you are in him, glory is yours. Why cling to the hope of early retirement? Why not let go of your thirst for power?

The Declaration of the Table

It is undeniable that Jesus of Nazareth was a historic person. And the best, most reliable historic documents of any primary source of history make plain that he asserted to be God and that all authority in Heaven and on earth is his. But the question before you this morning is this: so what? If you will follow Christ in all of life, you do not have the option of taking a Christian identity on and off like a jacket during Minnesota spring. If you were raised, if you died, if your life is hidden *with Christ*, who you *are* has forever been changed. As part of God's people, you are transformed with the risen Christ and eagerly wait for the day you will appear with him in glory when you will join fully in his triumph. And so, let us turn to declare our union with the risen Christ and that victory at the Table, where we eat and drink proclaiming his death *until he comes*.