

Setting Our Minds on Things Above

Col 3:1-4

3 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.

After forty years of faithful service overseas, Henry Morrison and his wife were returning to NY due to age and failing health. As the ship they were on approached the dock in NY, they saw a huge crowd waiting and cheering and for a moment Henry thought maybe their labor hadn't gone unnoticed, but they soon realized that the crowd was there for President Theodore Roosevelt who was on the same ship returning from a big game hunting trip to Africa.

As the missionary couple walked to the one room apartment their mission board had provided them, Henry was struggling with the contrast between their unnoticed return after decades of serving God faithfully and the fanfare President Roosevelt received for a couple weeks of hunting. "It doesn't seem right" he said to his wife. Weeks later he was still so troubled by the thought that they had given their lives in service to the Lord and no one seemed to care or notice that his wife said to him, "Henry, God doesn't mind if we honestly question Him, but you need to tell the Lord what's on your heart and get this settled."

So Henry went to his room and got on his knees and poured out his heart to the Lord. After awhile he came out and his wife could see by the peace on Henry's face that the issue had been settled in his heart. "What happened?" she asked. "I told the Lord how bitter I was that the President received this tremendous homecoming but no one even met us at the dock when we returned home. Then the Lord spoke to my heart and said, 'Henry, you're not home yet!'"

The Bible tells us that for Christians, this world is not our home. We are pilgrims passing through. Hebrews 11 describes men and women of faith who looked forward to a "better country, a heavenly country". As Christians we also should have a pilgrim mentality as we look forward to a better place, our eternal home.

But how do we long for a place we've never been? How do we live in such a way that the only world we've ever known isn't our home, and a kingdom that we've never seen and can't even imagine, *is* our home? The answer is faith. Like the men and women of Heb. 11, faith enables us to see what we can't see, long for what we've never known, and look forward to a better country we've never set foot in. We see and long for Christ's eternal kingdom with eyes of faith. What Paul is urging us as believers to do is to strengthen that faith by setting our minds and hearts on the eternal rather than the temporal.

I don't think most of us think about heaven as much as we should - I know I don't. we might even worry about becoming -as DL Moody's cautioned - so heavenly minded that we're of no earthly good. Paul's not worried about that. He's more concerned about believers becoming so earthly minded that we're of no earthly good. That's the greater danger today.

Being heavenly minded doesn't mean checking out on life or disengaging from the earthly relationships or responsibilities that God has given us. Paul certainly never did that - he lived an amazingly full life, carried tremendous responsibilities on his shoulders, and cultivated life-long relationships with many people. Checking out was the last thing on Paul's mind.

Biblical heavenly mindedness isn't escapism, but it does bring great strength and comfort to us in this life. In hard times, in severe trials, in suffering, knowing that this life isn't all there is, knowing that we will live forever and that every wrong will be made right, and every tear wiped away by the hand of God Himself brings unspeakable comfort to our souls. When we arrive at the dock and no one is waiting for us and we feel like our efforts go unrecognized and question whether we're making a difference at all, to remember that we're not home yet is a tremendous comfort and encouragement to us.

Biblical mindedness also isn't focused on extra-biblical speculations about what heaven will be like. The Bible does say a lot about heaven and we can enjoy speculating within limit about the good things that God has in store for us, but being heavenly minded isn't about pursuing speculation, it's about pursuing sanctification. Sanctification is a long word that means becoming like Jesus in our character.

The past couple weeks we've seen that true holiness doesn't come by keeping a lot of rules or making oaths to God and then trying real hard to keep them. Holiness gets worked into our hearts as heaven gets worked into our hearts. John writes,

See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears^[a] we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:1-3

Having the hope burning in our hearts that we are beloved children of God and that Jesus is returning and when he does, we'll be transformed into his perfect image, has a purifying effect in our lives. What rules and commitments can't do to make us holy, looking forward to Christ's return by faith can do. Paul's admonition here from vs 1-17 is very practical:

Because we have been raised with Christ, we should live like we've been raised with Christ!

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. Col. 3:1-2

The word "if" can make it seem like Paul isn't certain whether we've been raised with Christ or not, but a better translation would be "since you have been raised with Christ" *Since you've been raised with Christ* - Paul is stating an accomplished fact, we have been raised with Christ, and since we've been raised with Christ this should change everything about how we live. Beginning with this...

1. *We should take the grave cloths off and get out of the cemetery!*

Raised with Christ refers to the fact that we died with Christ and have been raised from the dead with him. But remember when Jesus raised Lazarus, he had to instruct those around them to take the grave cloths off him. Lazarus was alive, but he still had the trappings of death clinging to him. Paul is reminding

us that being raised with Christ is only the beginning - now take the grave cloths off and get out of the cemetery!

The grave cloths are the dead sins that still cling to us, the cemetery is the dead-end ways and values of the world. Beginning in verse 5 Paul will describe some of the grave cloths that cling to us: sexual immorality, impurity, evil desire, anger, etc. God didn't raise us up with Christ, in order to live in a cemetery bound by the grave cloths of sin. God raised us up in Christ that we might live a new life in the freedom and goodness of God. Being heavenly minded, in the context of Col. 3, looks like this:

2. We should seek God's will in our lives

...seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.(vs 1)

The picture of Christ seated at the right hand of God is a reference to God's rule and authority over all things. God sits on the throne, and Jesus sits at his right hand, ruling and reigning over all.

In the Lord's prayer, Jesus taught us to pray to the Father, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." God's will is always good and loving and best. The core problem of this sick world we live in is that we've rebelled against God's good and perfect will and have embraced the devil's will which is to throw out God's rule and do our own thing.

Being heavenly minded has little to do with speculating about whether the streets in heaven are paved with gold, and much to do with making God's will in every situation our top priority. And we shouldn't think of God's will in micromanaging terms as if God is hovering over every decision we make to see if we make the right one, the one that is "His will" or if we're going to miss His will and mess up. Am I supposed to take this job or that job? Which is God's will? Am I supposed to move or stay where I am? Am I supposed to buy this car or that car? (I put that last one in cause that's where I'm at personally)

God's will doesn't have so much to do with specific decisions (unless those decisions involve obeying God's word or sinning), as much as it has to do with kingdom priorities like love, kindness, patience and forgiveness. One decision might be more wise or less wise than another, but ultimately God is more concerned with our loving and obeying Him in whatever decision we make than He is about the particular decision itself.

Christ is sitting at the right hand of God the Father, ruling and reigning over all and the Christian life is one of being submitted to the rule and authority of Christ. We are to seek his Lordship over every area of our lives. Seeking God's will in our lives is what I think Paul means when he says we should seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Next, being heavenly minded looks like this:

3. We should set our minds and hearts on things that are glorious, not on things that are earthly

Paul just says set your mind, but I've found that whatever I set my mind on, eventually wins my heart. It is so important what we set our minds on. You've heard the saying, ""get your mind out of the gutter." That is said about people who take things that aren't meant in an impure way and immediately go to an impure place with it. I worked with a guy years ago who always seemed to do that. He found dirty

innuendoes out of the most innocent of statements. That didn't just happen. He trained his mind and his thoughts to go to the gutter. It's what he fed his mind, it's where he found his humor. He was setting his mind on things that are in the gutter.

Paul is saying to do the opposite: cultivate a mindset that thinks of glorious things, of heavenly things. When we read the Bible, we are setting our minds on higher things, and we are able to think God's thoughts after Him. This is closely connected to what we were talking about last week with returning to our first love. If we are constantly filling our thoughts with earthly things, we are going to find our affections caught up with earthly temporal things. If we set our minds and affections on Christ we will find ourselves doing more and more out of genuine love for Christ.

Now, it could seem that seeking the things that are above, and setting our minds on things that are above could make us so heavenly minded that we're of no earthly good. But the "things that are above" don't have so much to do with whether we'll be able to fly in heaven or whether our favorite pet will be waiting for us in heaven. It has more to do with the priorities and purposes of God becoming our priorities and purposes. So that we do, as Paul says in verse 17, *everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him*. Literally everything in life becomes an opportunity to glorify God and leave the fragrance of Jesus as we go.

Simon Stylite was a monk who lived in the 4th century. In his pursuit of a holy life, he climbed a 50 foot pole and lived there for over 30 years. A wall was erected around him to keep the crowds from getting to him. When his own mother sought to see her, he sent her a message: *"If we are worthy, we shall see one another in the life to come."* I don't presume to know how God views Simon Stylite or his unusual lifestyle, but that's not what I think of when I think of setting our minds on things above. I see it more as following Jesus in the pursuit of heaven's priorities and purposes here on earth. Not isolated from the world, but engaged with it, with the prayer that we might impact it with the love of God.

Just like this guy at work could take any comment or situation and pull it into the gutter, Paul is saying that as we set our minds on the things of Christ, we will pull every comment and situation and relationship upward to noble and higher purposes, to God's purposes, to heaven's purposes.

4. *We should always remember that our lives are hidden with Christ but one day we will appear with him in glory*

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. Col. 3:3-4*

There is a degree to which the life of Christ in us and the hope of heaven is obscured in this world. Our lives are hidden with Christ. The world doesn't see, rarely applauds, and often scoffs at the hope of heaven that burns in our hearts and the gospel work that we do. When the boat comes to the dock, there are no crowds to cheer us on. Many of us will live our entire lives in obscurity, no one noticing, no one cheering. On this side. On this world's docks. But we aren't home yet.

One day, when Christ appears in glory - and all the world will look upon him whom they have pierced and mourn. When the scoffers will shake in fear, and the evil will beg the mountains to fall on them to cover them from his wrath, on that day we will appear with him in glory. We will be glorified, our bodies

radiating the power and glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Our character instantly transformed to be like his perfectly pure character.

we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. ³ And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure. 1 John 3:2-3

That will be a glorious day! Live for that glory now, that's what Paul is saying. Life on this earth is so short, it will be over before we know it. I really enjoyed having all my kids home this week (Jared on the weekends), and my sweet grandson Asher. One thing that brought a smile to my heart was hearing my three kids talk and laugh about memories they have, like the time Jared kicked a soft fuzzy soccer ball and it hit a vase and the vase hit the wall and put a hole in it. The hole is still there. I am grateful to God that my kids love being together and enjoy sweet memories of growing up together. But those memories also remind me - time has gone by pretty quickly. And it will continue to speed by. Setting our minds on things above doesn't mean we shouldn't enjoy or treasure earthly memories or earthly good times. But our hope can't be invested in them, cause they will all fade away and our lives here on this earth will soon be over.

Last Saturday a dear brother in the Lord, Tom Kuehner, went home to be with the Lord. No one expected it so soon, least of all him. And we pray for his wife, kids and family as they grieve the loss of their husband and father and son and friend. But we don't grieve for Tom. He is with Christ in glory. And one day he's coming back, and this time it will be in glory. And that's true for all whose life is hidden with Christ in God.

A body that has no aches, no pains, no tears, no hunger, and no need for sleep anymore. A body that has been freed from the vise grip of sin. Free to love passionately, and obey God perfectly. And we will live for God's perfect will every moment of every day for all of eternity. Think about that, look forward to that, and may it inspire us to live our lives today for that day.