

## The Core: Living with Jesus at the Center

What Do You Live For?

Colossians 3:1-4

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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 (Col 3:1-4).

Jesus is the core. He's the center of the universe. He's the heart of the redemptive plan of God. You don't make Jesus the center; he is the center – of everything. Life revolves around him.

That is the message of the book of Colossians, and our aim in this study has been to unpack that truth and bring it into our lives.

We are concluding today a six message series within the book of Colossians called "Jesus-centered thinking." In this section (Col 2:8-3:4) we've learned the importance of keeping Jesus at the core of our understanding of what real spirituality is all about. Here's what we learned:

- 2:8-10 - We were warned about spiritual drift (placing hope and trust in things that used to lead us to Jesus)
- 2:11-12 – We learned about the powerful position of being circumcised and baptized in Jesus
- 2:13-15 – We celebrated the fact that Jesus moves people from death to life
- 2:16-19 – We were introduced to the subject of legalism and our tendency to be intimidated or sidelined by others
- 2:20-23 – We discovered the dangerous root of legalism: self-worship

Next week we will move into our final series entitled "Jesus-centered living." The final nine messages will deal with some specific applications of everything we've heard thus far. We are going to hear about things that need to be put off (e.g., immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, anger and wrath – Col 3:5-10), and what we need to put on (e.g., compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience – Col 5:12-13). Further, we will see how all of this relates to real life relationships: husbands, wives, children, masters, and slaves. In other words, Paul is going to show us the sweeping importance of Jesus-centered thinking. He is going to show us how to live out a Jesus-centered life.

Now before we jump into this section next week, there is one more piece that we need to fit into place. It is the matter of cultivating Christ-centeredness with the right foundation and the right focus. In other words, Paul calls us to holistic pursuit of Jesus-centered living that affects our attitude, our ambitions, our mind, our heart, our will, and our outlook in life. Jesus becomes the center gravity around which everything revolves or orbits.

If there was one thing that I really, really want you to get from this series it would be this statement: life revolves around Jesus, not me. Our text this morning calls us to live for Jesus, not ourselves. So how do we do that?

For the sake of helping you remember this, I like to break this down into three areas: Truth, Target, and Trust.

### **Truth: Celebrating the spiritual foundations of life**

Biblical Christianity teaches that life is based upon propositional truth. Undergirding all of life is a deposit of absolute truth that has vast and sweeping effects on life. For example, the Bible tells us that every person is a sinner and that we have fallen short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23). The Bible also says that there is one mediator between God and man – Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5). Further, the Bible tells us that there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:1), and that as many as received Him (Jesus), to them he gave the right to become the children of God (John 1:12). Christianity is grounded in belief in the life-transforming truth of the Bible.

Everyone believes something. Everyone has a worldview. Everyone in this room is a theologian. The question is whether or not you are a Biblical one. A number of years the State of Michigan was wrestling with whether or not kids in a public school could be taught creation side by side evolution as an alternative answer to the origins of life. A reporter called the church and asked, "I'd like to know what you think about religion being brought into the science classroom?" He never used my quote because I said, "With all due respect, every day that a science teacher teaches evolution he or she is bringing religion into the classroom. Religion is already being taught in the science classes our public schools. This is nothing new." Underneath the way everyone lives is a set of beliefs. Beliefs govern how you live. Propositional truth creates a grid through which we live.

How does this relate to Colossians? It is central to it. Once again we find that Paul talks about the reality of our position in Christ (propositional truth claim), and then he points out how we ought to live in light of that truth. For example look at 3:1 – "If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above..." Do you see it? We have propositional truth or positional reality that leads to a practical application. Position leads to priority which leads to practice. I need to know who I am, what's important, and what to do.

What is the undergirding truth in 3:1-4? There are four truths, two that we've seen before:

### **1. You were raised with Christ (v 1)**

This is a familiar theme in Colossians. We first heard it in 2:12 – “you were also raised with him through faith...” And the meaning is that those who receive Christ share in his victory over the grave. There is a new power – a resurrection power – to walk in newness of life (Rom 6:4). The result is that just as Jesus is alive to God we, who in “in Him”, are alive as well (Rom 6:11). We live vicariously! Remember that?

### **2. You died with Christ (v 3)**

Skip to verse three for the second truth. It is a familiar one as well: “for you have died.” Often this positional truth is directly connected in the text to being raised with Christ (see Col 2:12 & 2:13). To have died with Christ means that there is a permanent and powerful severing of the believer from the old way of living and everything that went along with it. There are no “do-overs” or mulligans when it comes to death. Death severs.

Putting the two together again we see the beautiful and rich spiritual position that believers in Jesus have been given. The old way of life has been severed, and a new approach to life has come. All of it is real and foundational only because of Jesus.

### **3. Your life is hidden with Christ in God (v 3)**

The third truth is one that captures something important but in a new way. On the heels of talking about the severance from the old life, Paul says, “your life is hidden with Christ in God.” What does this mean?

Many secular cultures believed that a person's life was directly connected to some external object or life token. The belief was that as long as the other-world life was preserved, then one's life on earthy was also preserved.<sup>1</sup> Paul may be playing off this notion, and using it to identify that the other-world object to which our life is connected in none other than Christ himself.

In fact the word “hidden” means to keep secret, and it is in the perfect tense indicating that it is an event completed in the past with direct effects today. It seems that the context of secrecy here implies safety. In other words, even though you cannot see it (nor can others) your life is kept secure by the fully divine Christ (thus: “Christ in God”).

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<sup>1</sup> F.F. Bruce. The Epistle to the Colossians. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans Publishing, 1984. p. 135.

So the phrase “with Christ” is enormously significant. It means that we not only share in his death and resurrection; we also share in his present position in the presence of the triune Godhead. Therefore, all the power of Christ and all the power of the triune Godhead are leveraged to keep you hidden in Christ. Is it any wonder that Paul would say, nothing “will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom 8:39).<sup>2</sup>

#### **4. You will appear with him in glory (v 4)**

The final positional reality is related to eschaton, the consummation, or, as it is often called, the second coming of Jesus. This moment in the history of the church will be the great disclosure of the previously hidden relationship that we have with Jesus. Our hidden relationship will now be undeniably evident because we will be with him in glory. This is also the moment where the work of salvation will be completed, and we will be perfect, sinless, and experience eternal life. We will be like Jesus!

Notice the position – practice model in 1 John 3:1-3 –

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 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.

Paul is pointing us toward the certain day in our future when the wrestling with sin will be over. He is reminding us that there is coming a day when we will be like him – fully sanctified. So this foundational piece relates to the security of our future. Life may be confusing, uncertain, and hard, but the outcome is fixed. You will appear with him in glory!

Now think of what we've just talked about regarding these four foundational matters. Notice that when you put these four together that there are positional statements rooted in the past (died and raised), the present (hidden in Christ), and the future (appear with him in glory).

Think of it! God has got you covered! And the reason he did all of that and the reason that Paul talks about this is because it is directly connected to practical living. Remember position, then priority, then practice. That is the beginning of cultivating Christ-centeredness. The next area builds on this important foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> This is yet another reason why I cannot agree with those who think that we can lose our salvation or somehow forfeit our right to it. The undergirding grace here is not our works before or after conversion, it is the foundational truth that we are hidden in Christ. In my mind, the positional nature of salvation trumps any element of my actions. I think that those who think that salvation can be lost miss the superiority of position over practice. This passage and many others indicate that position is a work of God and as such it is kept by God. Practice is the fruit, and it cannot sever the root of position in Christ.

## **Target: Orienting my life on Christ**

Paul is making a bridge in this section from doctrinal truth to practical living, and he calls believers, based upon their position, to orient their lives on Christ. In other words, Jesus becomes our target. He's the center of our universe, he holds everything together, and our lives orbit around him.

According to verses one and two that involves two things:

### **1. Seeking those things that are above**

This is a command that we are to practice continually. The meaning of the word "seek" is to bend the will toward or to orient the will. It is the same word that Jesus used in Matthew 6:33 – "seek first the kingdom of God..." It can mean to strive after, to desire, or endeavor. It means what you want.

Sometimes we use the word "look" in the same way in our context. For instance when your children are bugging each other you might say, "Are you looking to get in trouble?" Or when Savannah has a new dress on Sundays, she'll come in my office and do a little girl twirl as Sarah's says, "She's looking for you to notice her dress."

But notice what the orientation is here. Paul gives us a further explanation of what he means by "above." He describes as "where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." So the "above things" are directly related to the personal presence of the exalted and honored Christ. Paul's use of the imagery of Christ at the right hand of God clearly communicates that he has in mind Jesus' position of supreme authority. This idea comes from Psalm 110 (particularly verses 1 and 4), and these verses are quoted or alluded to 33 times in the New Testament.<sup>3</sup>

"The Lord says to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool...4 The Lord has sworn and will not change his mind, "You are a priest forever after the order of Melchizedek" (Ps 110:1,4)

So what does this all mean? In short it means that there is a real place with a real Savior who is really powerful and he reigns over all, and those who know him have a will that is bent that direction. In other words, they see everything through the lens of the Lordship of Jesus Christ. They love the Lordship of Christ. They want to expand the Lordship of Christ. They celebrate the Lordship of Christ. And they see everything – their careers, cars, and kids, their employment, entertainment, income, their marriage, money, and priorities – through this lens of Christ.

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<sup>3</sup> See Acts 2:33-35; 5:31; 7:55, 56; Rom 8:34; Eph 1:20; Heb 1:3,13; 8:1; 10:12; 12:2; 1 Pet 3:22; Rev 3:21

One of the successful strategies that I use when my heart is filled with wrong desires or when I'm trying to get to the heart of some sin issue is asking myself this question: "Mark, what do you want?" It points me back to the important matter of what I am seeking. The powerful and transforming target that Paul points us to is to seek Christ and his dominion!

Listen at the root of all anger, impatience, greed, lust, bitterness, and really all sin is a bent of the will that doesn't fit with who Jesus is. We've got to bend our wills, set our desires upon, and relentlessly seek through the power of Christ an orientation that seeks to magnify the Lordship of Christ.

## **2. Setting your mind on things that are above**

Finally, we are called to not only bend the will or desire, but to set our mind on these things. This is the second command – to intentionally focus your mind and heart on the things of Christ. The first command dealt more with desire or the bent of your will. But this command focuses more on what captures your attention and your affection.

The word translated as "mind" has a broad range of meaning that includes thinking, judging, meditating, or being intent on. In other parts of the Bible is translated as:

- Think – "not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think..." (Rom 12:3)
- Harmony - "Live in harmony with one another..." (Rom 12:16)
- Same mind – "Complete my joy by being of the same mind" (Phil 2:2)
- Mind / mentality – "Have this mind in you which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Phil 2:5)

Setting your mind includes thought process (e.g., what you think about), but it also includes what you love and what you are passionate about. That is why the King James translates this word as "affection." Today that would not be a good translation, unless you understood it in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century language where it meant a fully orbed desire and orientation that springs from thought. In other words, affections include the mind, heart, and feelings. So it means to set the focus of your life, the trajectory of your heart, and the well-spring of your emotions on Jesus.

Notice that Paul assumes here that your mind has to be set this direction. It will not go there naturally. You, by the power of the Holy Spirit, have to point your mind that direction. Think of it like hoisting and trimming up a sail on a sail boat. You have to set the sail, so it can catch the wind.

From a spiritual standpoint that involves a bending of the will (seeking) and a pointing of the mind and heart (setting). You've got to have the right target.

**Trust: Applying these truths to life**

I don't want to leave this message without some very specific applications points or ideas for how we could make this work in our lives. I can imagine that there are some here today who might ask, "Okay, so how do I do this?" Let me give you some suggestions:

- Get passionate about your position
- Celebrate that God changed the orientation of your will
- Realize that your affection and desire will downward without forward movement.
- Look for things that cause unnecessary spiritual distraction. Some of them you may want to give up temporarily or permanently.
- Pray
- Sing often.
- Be sure you are spending time in the Word.
- Pray
- Memorize scripture.
- Saturate your environment with Scripture.
- Pray spontaneously
- Make the first and last words of your day a prayer.
- Read great books (especially old books) that have stood the test of time.
- Find a godly man or woman and ask to spend time with them.

None of these, on their own will work without the empowerment of the Spirit and trusting in Christ. We must come with a humble heart and say to Jesus, "Help me seek the right things and set my mind on the right things!"

Truth, Target, and Trust.

There is truth undergirding us. We have a target that we have to strive towards. And we take one step at a time trusting that with God's help we can a life that orbits around the most valuable person in the universe: Jesus.

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