

Heavenly Minded; Earthly Good (Colossians 3:1-4)

I originally was planning to tackle 15 verses this morning, but by 11 AM Monday morning, I realized that wasn't going to happen. There's just too much here to blow by it too quickly. This is so glorious, so wonderfully rich that I had to limit my coverage to the first four verses.

I really think that we miss out on so much peace, so much joy when we fail to realize who we are in Jesus Christ. This world is not our home. This is not where we reside if we are born again. As Christians, we need to remember to whom we belong. We need to understand which Kingdom holds our true citizenship.

In Chapter 2, Paul did his best to make us understand three things. First, we need to understand who Jesus is. He is the eternal Son of God, the second person of the Trinity. Without giving up His Godhood, He entered into His creation and became 100% man. That's what we celebrate this time of year ... His incarnation. Jesus became Immanuel – God with us, sharing our common lot.

Because He is the God-Man, He was able to accomplish something almost too wonderful for words. He lived a perfect, sinless life, then He sacrificed Himself on the cross to pay the death penalty for our sins and on the third day, He rose again. He lives today, right now, interceding for us at the right hand of the Father. If we accept that, if we believe that, if we name Him as Lord and believe He lives right now, we are saved from an eternity in hell.

Finally, last week, we looked at some of the implications for us. We must not add anything to the gospel of Christ. We must not let anyone judge us based on self-imposed religion. In fact, we must not judge ourselves based on our performance of any religious stuff. Salvation is by God's grace alone, through faith alone, in Jesus Christ alone.

For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.
(Ephesians 2:8-9)

We are not saved by our works, but that doesn't mean there is nothing for us to do. God created us for good works, but for us to live a life that is pleasing to God, we have to have the right mind-set. We have to be God-centric in all that we do. We have to set our mind on things above.

Now, you probably have heard that old saying, that is almost always meant as a put-down "That person is so heavenly minded, she's no earthly good." I once knew a pastor who said that regularly and he was a good, godly man, but I have to take issue. You see, the Bible tells us that if we are to be any earthly good for the Kingdom of God, we must be heavenly minded! So with that in mind, let's take a look at Colossians 3:1-4.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

This passage starts with a very important precondition: *If then you were raised with Christ* Of course, this comes from Paul's reasoning in Chapter 2. None of what follows will do anything for you unless you have been born again. Jesus was about as direct as He could be:

"Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." (John 3:3)

Being born again is something the Holy Spirit must do for you. You can't do it on your own any more than a baby could come into the world on his own. Your natural condition is one of spiritual death. Folks don't want to hear that, but it's what the Bible teaches. David knew it:

Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, And in sin my mother conceived me. (Psalms 51:5)

We are all natural-born sinners. We aren't sinners because we sin. We sin because we are sinners. And all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. (Romans 3:23)

Now, in Ephesians, Chapter 2, Paul puts it very clearly.

*And you He made alive, [now take note of our natural condition] who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and **were by nature children of wrath**, just as the others. (Ephesians 2:1-3)*

Do you see that? You were children of wrath. You were born under the curse. You were spiritually dead, which means you loved all the wrong things and were incapable of loving the right things. Jesus said:

And this is the condemnation, that the light has come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. (John 3:19)

That is our natural condition.

But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. (1 Corinthians 2:14)

But God the Holy Spirit can make you alive.

And you He made alive, (Ephesians 2:1)

When God the Holy Spirit breathes life into you, you are resurrected! Before that happens, the gospel is foolishness to you. You can't understand it because you don't want to understand it. You want to be the captain of your own ship. You want to call the shots. You are self-centered, selfish, rebellious, and terrified that someone is going to take what is yours. But then the Spirit kicks you to life, sometimes even against your own will, and you understand your condition. You know you are in serious trouble, so you stop your war against God and simply say yes to Jesus.

Faith is a gift granted by an incredibly gracious God. It's okay to pray for faith. It's okay to ask God for the faith to believe the gospel. He will answer that prayer.

And at the moment you first believe, you will be raised with Christ. The precondition will be met and the rest of this passage is for you.

And the rest of the passage is a command. This is something that, as a Christian, it is your duty to do. Jesus once asked ...

"But why do you call Me 'Lord, Lord,' and not do the things which I say? (Luke 6:46)

That's a good question! When the Bible gives us a command, I think we'd better pay attention.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. (Colossians 3:1-2)

God wants you to be heavenly minded. He wants us to seek out those things that are of heaven. He wants us to set our minds on those things that are of heaven and He wants us to stop being obsessed with the things of this world.

Okay, so what does that look like? What are the characteristics of a heaven-centered life and what can we do to reach that point in our walk of faith? Here are some suggestions to help you be heavenly-minded:

First of all, you need to trust in the promises of God. That means you actually need to know what the promises of God are. It's not that hard; The Holy Spirit wrote them down for you. They're here in this Book. And believe me, there are some amazing promises here. For one thing, did you know that the people of God are on the winning side? We are! There will be a new Heaven and a New Earth in which righteousness dwells.

And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." (Revelation 21:3-4)

Do you believe His promises?

And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose. (Romans 8:28)

When you believe God's promises, then you exclaim with the Apostle Paul:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38-39)

Setting your mind on things above means taking God at His word.

"Let not your heart be troubled; [says Jesus] you believe in God, believe also in Me. (John 14:1)

Trust in the promises of God!

Secondly, setting your mind on things above means that you are to take control of your thoughts. You need to master your thought-life. Bring your thoughts into captivity.

*For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty in God for pulling down strongholds, casting down arguments and every high thing that exalts itself against the knowledge of God, **bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ,** (2 Corinthians 10:4-5)*

Your thought-life is important. Are you going to set your mind on the futility of this world, or are you going to set your mind on being obedient to Christ?

There's been a lot of talk about radicalized Muslims lately. Well, I really think what the world needs is more radicalized Christians, brothers and sisters who are so sold out for Christ that they will strive for radical obedience, no matter what. But radicalized Christians don't kill people or set off bombs. They obey Jesus:

But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, (Matthew 5:44)

How radical is that? How different than the satanic agenda of false religion?

Have you wondered what is going on in our world today? How is it that an organization like ISIS can capture the imagination of young men and women? It all comes from hearts that are absolutely devoid of the peace, the joy and the agape love available only through faith in Jesus Christ.

There are about 1.6 billion Muslims in the world today. Only a small minority are so filled with satanic hate that they are willing to kill and be killed in jihad. But every one of them desperately needs what only Jesus can provide. Are you secure enough in your faith to pray for their salvation? Are you willing to be obedient to Christ's command to bless those who curse you?

That's what radical Christianity looks like.

So you, as a Christian, need to trust in God's promises and you need to take control of your thought-life. Another way you can set your mind on things above is to engage on godly self-talk. I'm not talking about some psycho-babble "I'm okay, you're okay thing." Godly self-talk is the sort of thing David did.

Why are you cast down, O my soul? And why are you disquieted within me? Hope in God; For I shall yet praise Him, The help of my countenance and my God. (Psalms 42:11)

You read Psalm 42 and you will find that David was discouraged. He had to have a little chat with himself. "What's wrong with you, Dave? Why are you so stressed out? Trust your God, dude; He always comes through. Praise Him; He's all you need."

Well this world is a scary place. It's easy to become disquieted. It's easy to fall prey to despair. We need to remind ourselves of just how great our God is. We need to give ourselves a pep-talk once in a while. I sure need it. So do you.

Finally, you need to take an eternal view of things, not a temporal view.

For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever. (1 John 2:16-17)

This world is not my home;

I'm just a passing through;

My treasures are laid up

Somewhere beyond the blue.

I'm going to steal an illustration I heard in a sermon earlier this week. Consider actors who are in a stage play. One of them is playing the part of a king. He is as wealthy as

king Solomon. He's dressed in the finest of clothing. He's enjoying the best of this life. People are bowing to him, making sure all his needs and wants are met.

Another actor is playing a homeless guy, a pauper. He's dressed in rags. He doesn't have two pennies to rub together. He's hungry, starving even and nobody gives him the time of day.

But when the play is over, they both go out the stage door and reenter the real world. Whatever their station in the play is completely forgotten.

Well, this world is the stage; it's not the real thing. Eternity is the real thing. You need to maintain an eternal perspective.

Well, my friends, if you maintain a heavenly perspective, setting your mind on things above, it's going to change your life here. If you trust in the promises of God, take control of your thought-life, engage in godly self-talk and keep an eternal perspective, believe me, it's going to change it for the better. You will experience more peace and more joy than you ever thought possible and that peace and joy will be completely independent of your circumstances.

It will cause you to have a changed view of your possessions. You will realize that hanging on to what you have and trying to acquire more and more is actually a fool's errand. But at the same time, you will be able to enjoy those things you have, and enjoy them to the fullest. You will also be free to use all your resources for the glory of God, not because you have to, but because you want to.

Once in a while someone will ask me if our Church requires tithing. Does everybody have to give 10% of their income and if so, is that pre-tax or is it post-tax? Well the short answer is "of course not"

Therefore, if you died with Christ from the basic principles of the world, why, as though living in the world, do you subject yourselves to regulations—(Colossians 2:20)

We covered that last week, remember? Don't let anyone judge you by external religious stuff.

But a lot of our folks do tithe, not out of obligation, but out of gratitude. Tithing is a good starting point because you realize that every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of Lights. We give out of humble thanksgiving for what Christ has done for us and a lot of our folks don't set ten percent as a limit, either. They realize that everything we have belongs to God anyway. They've also learned that you really can't out-give God.

The heavenly-minded person will also have a changed view of suffering. Like Paul says:

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. (Romans 8:18)

If we are called to suffer, we know it is a very temporary thing. We also know that Jesus has promised that He will be glorified in it. How else can you explain those glorious Christians who will take a bullet rather than deny their faith in Jesus?

Finally, the heavenly-minded person will have a changed view of earthly pleasures. Yes, it is okay to enjoy your life here on Earth. It's okay to enjoy your family. It's okay to enjoy the possessions God has entrusted you with. It is way okay to enjoy this absolutely

beautiful creation. It's okay to enjoy a good meal with friends. It's okay to get a thrill from a particularly good golf shot.

But as we enjoy the pleasures God has provided, let us make sure we remain heavenly minded. Thank the Lord for all His blessings and always remember to say "Wow, as good as this is, Heaven is going to be even better!" Heaven is going to be so much better than anything we can experience now, anything we can imagine. When you enjoy good things here on earth, God is just giving us the tiniest foretaste here on Earth.

Live your life here on Earth with your mind fixed on Heaven because when you do, you will glorify your Lord and Savior. Live *Coram Deo* – In the very presence of God.