

Alive in Christ: Things Above

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 June 2017

Preacher: Rev. Daniel Beilman

[0 : 00] In 2014, Vanity Fair had an excellent long-form piece about Air France Flight 447. This is the flight in the year 2009 that crashed into the Atlantic Ocean on its way from Brazil to France.

The piece makes the case that amazing technology has rendered planes so safe and so automatic that the pilots can be unprepared to handle a stressful situation when things go wrong.

With this flight, it was just one little glitch that led to a cascade of little errors that eventually brought down the plane.

When the glitch occurred, had the pilot flying realized what displays to look at and how to interpret them it would have been a simple enough fix and nobody would realize that there had been anything amiss.

In Colossians 3, Paul is telling the Colossians to keep their eyes on a compass. This is a brand new church. Things have started well. People are very excited.

[1 : 15] But there seems to be a danger of the church losing its way. In addition to the gospel, the church is being tempted to add other things on to their religious experience.

Take some bits from pagan folk religion. Take some bits from Judaism. And perhaps they can have higher, more complete spiritual experience.

So in the first two chapters of this letter, as we've heard over the last couple of months, Paul exalts Jesus as absolutely supreme.

The source of life and wisdom and fullness. He exposes the teachings that the Colossians are being tempted to follow as complete rubbish.

And then in our passage today, he says, Don't set your heart on those things. But set your minds on things above where Christ is.

[2 : 19] What about us? What captivates us? What determines our actions? What do we have our eyes set on?

What is our compass? What does that mean? What does that mean? That's one of three things we're going to examine in this passage. We're going to look at our conversion, our compass, and our confidence.

Our conversion, our compass, and our confidence. Let's pray. Let's pray. Father, we are grateful to gather here in a still, quiet, beautiful space.

Grateful for the golden sun shining through these windows. Grateful to be together. Grateful that you are here. Because we need to hear your voice.

We've just come from a week of noise, chaos, cacophony, insanity. We need to hear your voice in this still, peaceful place.

[3 : 50] So speak to us. Restore our sanity. We may love you deeper. We may love you deeper.

And understand your deep love for us. We pray in Jesus' name. Amen. So let's look first at our conversion.

Paul has a lot to say about a lot of things. But sometimes he does us a favor. And he distills his teaching and his theology into concise, compact paragraphs.

And these first four chapters of Colossians 3 are one of these occasions. If you were to ask Paul, what is the essence of being Christian? Paul would say it's union with Jesus.

Union with Christ. You see, in verse 1, he writes that you have been raised with Christ. In verse 3, he writes that you have died, which echoes chapter 2, verse 20, when Paul says that you have died with Christ.

[4 : 57] And also in verse 3, he says it a little differently. That your life is hidden with Christ in God. You are with Christ. In Christ. This is the theme of Paul's writings.

And here we have it all in compact form. When you became a Christian, you were united to Christ. And a couple things happened simultaneously. You were united to him in his death. And in his life. In his resurrection. In terms of his death, the life you once lived. And the sinful nature to which you were once enslaved was put to death. They were crucified. And in terms of resurrection, the Holy Spirit worked in your heart and caused you to be reborn. Or as Jesus said in John, to be born again. Your nature was changed. So that you can respond to God. And live in accordance with his will. And you were liberated from your old master and into a new life with a new king. [5 : 58] The Lord Jesus Christ. In Galatians, Paul also distills all of this. When he writes, I have been crucified with Christ.

It is no longer I who live. But Christ who lives in me. In the life that I now live. I live by faith in the Son of God. Who loved me. And gave himself for me. Now what happened at your conversion is also true continuously.

The Christian life involves dying to our sinful desires. And living in the power of Christ's resurrection. How do we live in the power of his resurrection? In verse 1 he writes, If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.

Where Christ is. Seated at the right hand of God. The right hand signifies a place of honor and prominence. Jesus is king.

He's the boss. He is sovereign. The fact of Christ's sovereignty is meant to orient us and provide us with our compass throughout our lives.

[7 : 05] This is our second point. Having been united to Christ, we now have a compass to orient us and to give us direction. Our compass does two things for us, among many.

When we endure struggles and hardship, our compass encourages us. Christ's sovereignty encourages us.

Because we know the end of the story. We know who's in charge. It's like watching a sporting event that you've DVR'd. And you know the outcome in advance.

Take, for example, this past Super Bowl. If you were a Patriots fan. If you were a Patriots fan. And only knew that the game ended in the Patriots' favor, 34-28.

Then you would not have been so discouraged when the Patriots were down 28-3. Because you knew the outcome. And could enjoy the game. And that was this year's football illustration.

[8 : 11] At Church of the Advent. Stay tuned. Next year we might get another. In the same way, when we keep Christ as our focus.

And know that he is in control of the final outcome. Which has already been determined. And when we keep our eyes focused on that. We become far less encouraged. As we face life's struggles.

That's first. The second. Keeping Christ as our compass. Gives us moral direction. We owe our allegiance and obedience to the King. Even more.

We owe him our very desires. Our chief desires. Belong to Christ. Paul writes. Set your mind. Or some translations say.

Set your hearts. On things above. Not on things that are on earth. It can go. It can happen when you're backpacking. If you have a real compass.

[9 : 08] You know. With a magnet in it. If you have like metal in your backpack. For instance. Metal tent poles. That the poles can interfere with your compass.

And you could potentially wind up. Just walking around in circles. And you could have a real compass. So it's worth asking. What are things that pull us away from our true north? The book of James says that each of us are tempted.

When we are dragged away by our own evil desires. We're dragged away by our own desires. And after a desire is conceived. It gives birth to sin. I mean.

I mean. I mean. There's a lot of desires. We can talk about. That can pull us away. From true north. It would be worth spending time talking about.

One of the things that shapes our desires. For most of us. And that's our phones. Our phones shape our desires. Because we relate to our phones.

[10 : 06] Habitually. And quite often. And such behaviors shape our imaginations. And our desires. There's two books written. I'd highly recommend on this topic.

That have come out recently. Tommy mentioned one a few weeks ago. By Andy Crouch. It's called The TechWise Family. The other book is called 12 Ways Your Phone Is Changing You.

By Tony Renka. If you're doing well with prayer. You're bowing your head. Say five times a day. Right?

Once in the morning. Once in the evening. And then once before every meal. Five times a day would make roughly 1,700 times a year.

That you bow your head in prayer. Now in contrast. The average person looks at their smartphone. 81,500 times a year.

[11:03] That's versus 1,700. 81,500 times a year. I am essentially bowing my head. Right? That's 4.3 minutes. Between every time I look at the phone.

Which, if you think about it. Is that if I'm looking at my phone every 4.3 minutes. That means during this sermon you will have looked at your. Or been tempted to look at your phone 20 times.

Let that sink in. Okay. That's 80 minutes. It's not going to go that long. I was kidding. So phones are good.

I mean technology is good. But like good things. Like sex and alcohol and work. Good things can become addictions. We're addicted. And it's wreaking havoc.

On our relationships. I've had a smartphone now. Got my first one. Like six years ago. So I've had this phone for six years. I've had a smartphone for six years.

[12:05] Which means that my. For my two youngest sons. For their whole lives. All they can remember. Or as far back as they can remember. Is having to compete.

With a smartphone. For the love and attention. Of their father. He's constantly looking at his phone. On the couch. Sometimes at dinner.

Dad. Dad. Dad. Yeah. Just give me a minute. Right? And right in front of me. This phone is wreaking havoc. On my family.

I admit it. It hurts our families. And it hurts our friendships. Just the presence of a phone. It can be on silence. It can be in our bag. Just the presence of a phone.

In the midst of conversation. Reduces the depth. And vulnerability. With which we engage in conversations. With other people. Our phones are destructive. Because they crowd out God.

[13:02] From our thoughts. We can't bear. Stillness. And silence. In silence. We encounter our mortality. In the face of eternity. And in our anxiety.

Instead of turning to God. In prayer. We distract ourselves. By turning to our phones. We immerse ourselves. In aural. Visual. Noise.

Robert Cardinal Sarah. Writes. Our world no longer hears God. Because it is constantly speaking. At a devastating speed.

And volume. In order to say nothing. From morning. To evening. From evening. To morning. Silence no longer has any place at all.

The noise tries to prevent God himself from speaking. In this hell of noise. Man disintegrates. And is lost. He is broken up into countless worries.

[13:59] Fantasies. And fears. In order to get out of these depressing tunnels. He desperately awaits noise. So that it will bring him a few consolations. It's noise.

Noise is a deceptive. Addictive. And false. Tranquilizer. The tragedy of our world is never better summed up.

Than in the fury of senseless noise. That stubbornly hates silence. This age detests. The things. That silence brings us to.

Encounter. Wonder. And kneeling before God. God. Not only do our phones crowd out God.

But they replace him. With a different religious experience. We get high on the self-righteousness. That comes from expressing outrage. Over things that people say.

[14:53] Or write. Such and such politicians said that. George Washington built Monticello. Ugh. How can he say that? Everyone knows it's Jefferson. Come on. When you plaster that on your Twitter feed.

And your Facebook. And it makes you feel good about yourself. To publicly expose the faults and mistakes of others. I do this to you. When in actuality. Those who follow King Jesus.

Are to be disposed towards covering our neighbor's blemishes. Not to publicize them. The Christian is to be disposed to cover our neighbor's blemishes.

Not to publicize them. But it's hard to resist. Because it's a spiritual religious experience. So one young woman wrote.

About her struggles with internet addiction. Every scroll of my thumb. Brought a new judgment. Comparison. Or observation. That was followed by a feeling of either self-righteousness. [15:58] Or self-degradation. It's an addiction. So what do we do? Well one half of what Paul says. Is to not set our minds.

On things that are on earth. Andy Crouch recommends. A regular rhythm of fasting. From technology.

From our screens. One hour a day. One day a week. And one week per year. An hour a day. A day per week. And a week per year.

Now when I say the one day a week. I just kind of get all anxious. And nervous. Like oh. A day a week. I should be able to do that.

It means. I'm probably addicted. If I can't give up something. For just one day a week. Could you do that? Maybe we should. Try it together.

[16:57] This is just toppling an idol. Right? If we want to worship God. We need to topple the idol. That we're constantly. Bowing to. But I'm not just talking to.

The Christians that are in this room. I know there's many of us here. That aren't sure what we believe. When it comes to Jesus. And the claims that he made. About himself. This is for you too. This is for all of us. This is an addiction. And so we all need help. But at the same time. It's not enough just to say. Stop it.

Moralism. Won't help us. We might be able to see. That it's bad. And maybe call. It bad. But we don't have the power. To just stop desiring it.

We need what Thomas Chalmers. Called the expulsive power. Of a new affection. The expulsive power. Of a new affection.

[17:55] This happens in stillness. And silence. Silence. And it takes hard work. To make it happen. In a still and silent space.

Our love for Christ. Is nurtured. As we spend time with him. And talk with him. And to listen to him. My spiritual director.

Tells me about his friends. Who are good at this. And they do it in a number of different ways. It's just not one way. To do it. One guy has. Time with Jesus. On his calendar.

Same time. Every week. And his friends and his family know. That if they try to schedule something. In that time. He'll respond with. Sorry. That's my time with Jesus. And it happens every week.

And he counts on it. As does everybody else. Maybe that would work for you. Another one of his friends. Goes about it a little differently. Anytime he makes a decision.

[18:52] About what to do with his time. Anytime. He asks three questions. Will this help me create space for God? Will this help me be present to God?

And third. Will this help me love other people more? You might want to write these down. Or just go back and listen to it. On your Church of the Advent app. These three questions.

Will this help me create space for God? Will this help me be present to God? Will this help me love other people more? Whatever it is you choose.

You'll find the presence. Of a God. Who loves you. And embraces you. And gives you this confidence. Verse three.

That your life is hidden. With Christ. In God. Hidden with Christ. In God. In God. This is our third point. When in conversion.

[19:52] We are united to Christ. He gives us Christ. As a compass. And he gives us. A confidence. This confidence. That because you are united to Christ.

Your perseverance. To the end. Is secure. Your life. Is hidden. With Christ. In God. Hidden with Christ. Now Paul is probably drawing on. Old Testament language.

For instance. Psalm 27. Like we heard. Read. Earlier. By Elizabeth. Verse five. Of Psalm 27. Says. He will hide me in a shelter.

In the day of trouble. He will conceal me. Under the cover of his tent. I think Paul has a second. Meaning. In mind. When he writes.

Hidden. With Christ. It's because in verse four. He uses the word. Appear. Twice. So. Hidden. Up here. This.

[20:46] Is apocalyptic. Language. And some of you might remember. From our series in Daniel. Back in the fall. That apocalypse. Means. Disclosure.

Or. Revealing. What is true of you. In the future. Is true of you. Now. It just can't be seen yet.

And what is that truth. That you have. That you have. Already been raised. To everlasting life. You have already been raised. To everlasting life.

Your life. In eternity. Has already been made secure. Made secure. By Christ. And this is something that. Christians. I think.

Miss. A lot. Jen and I. We are on vacation. At the beach. A few years back. And we just went to the closest church.

[21 : 43] And it was youth. Day. At this church. In the middle of the service. Youth pastors up there. Talking. And he's saying. So proud of my kids. These kids are great. They just realized. The key. To the Christian life.

Is just sticking with it. And Jen and I. Looked at each other. We wanted to stand up. And say. No kids. That's not the key. The key to the Christian life. Is that God sticks with you.

The father. Sticks with you. Fathers have a bad reputation. For not sticking around. But the father. Sticks with us. In Isaiah. It said. It said that. God has. Engraved. Your names. On the palm of his hands.

And pagan worship. Back then. During worship. Worshippers. Worshippers. Would carve the name. Of their gods. On their hands. As painful reminders. To worship their gods.

[22 : 41] To get their attention. You see this. When Elijah. Is going face to face. Head to head. With the prophets of Baal. They're carving themselves. They're carving the names. Of their gods. On their hands. Trying to get their gods.

Attention. The father flips the script. He carves. Your names. On his hands. He never forgets you. He never gives up on you. My name.

From the palm of his hands. Eternity will not erase. Impressed on his heart. It remains. With marks. Of indelible grace.

Yes. I to the end. Will endure. As sure as the earnest. Is given. More happy. But not more secure. The glorified spirits.

In heaven. Now the grammar got a little crazy. Because it's a hymn. Did you hear that last line? That the souls who are already in the presence of our father. Yes. Are more happy than we are.

[23 : 37] Because you know. That's heaven. This is not. However. Their place in heaven is not more secure than yours. Your place. In eternity. Is as secure as those who are already there.

Isn't that great? Isn't that great? This is what Jesus says in John chapter 6. All that the father gives me. Will come to me.

And whoever comes to me. I will never cast out. And this is the will of him who sent me. That I should lose nothing of all that he has given me. But raise it up on the last day. For this is the will of my father.

That everyone who looks on the son. And believes in him. Should have eternal life. And I will raise him up. On the last day. I stick with them. Paul affirms this in Romans 8.

For I am convinced that neither death. Nor life. Neither angels. Nor demons. Neither the present. Nor the future. Nor any powers. Neither height. Nor depth.

[24 : 37] Nor anything else in all creation. Can separate us from the love of God. That is in Christ Jesus. Our Lord. We began this sermon.

With an illustration. That was a plane crash. But we don't have that fear. Both literally. And figuratively. We know how our story ends.

We land safely. In a land of peace. And plenty. Having shed those desires. That would pull us away from our true north. Jesus Christ.

At the right hand of our Father in Heaven. In the name of the Father and of the Son. And of the Holy Spirit. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen.