

A mind on glory

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[0 : 00] This morning's reading is from Colossians chapter 3, beginning at verse 1. Since then you have been raised with Christ.

Set your hearts on things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways in the life you once lived. But now you must also rid yourselves of all such things as these, anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips.

Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices, and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.

[1 : 23] Let's turn back now to the passage read earlier from Colossians chapter 3.

We're going to read a few verses again at the beginning of the chapter, which we're going to focus on in the sermon. Colossians 3 verse 1, When Christ is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

We live in kind of strange days, really. There's a whole lot of things that we can find strange about the days that we live in.

But one of the things that I find quite strange and quite surprising is how so many people, of people we see particularly in the media and the news, react or seem to react to things not necessarily logically or rationally, but very much emotionally.

Now, I guess in one sense that's not particularly surprising because we're emotional beings and people tend to react, at least initially, emotionally.

[3 : 02] But when emotion is kind of put forward as basically being the very basis of how we are to react to things, and some aspects of our culture seem to promote this, then that's quite surprising, especially when it sets logic and reason aside.

And what we see when that happens is that cultural and indeed biblical norms that have been norms for generations, you might say millennia even, are set aside.

And that really is quite surprising. I mean, for people three or four generations ago, that would have seemed completely impossible, and yet it seems to be happening.

They would have thought, if you can't give a good reason for something, then nobody's going to accept it. But many people these days accept things when there's no good reason for it, other than that they feel that that is what they want to accept.

So, you get really bizarre things, like a person feels that they're a cat, and they feel that they should be accepted as such.

[4 : 27] And I'm not making this up. I mean, there are people who actually believe that, or they say they believe that anyway, and they expect people to accept that. It's bizarre to us.

It seems kind of ridiculous, but that's the kind of reality that we see in the world around us. And it seems like more and more there are those groups that are pushing to indoctrinate the rest of society to accept this kind of madness.

It brings to my mind the story of the emperor's new clothes. And it's sad, really, how societal pressure can actually push forward this kind of agenda and cause people to, even if they don't necessarily agree with these things, to just accept them because they're afraid to stand up and say

anything about it, even if they're in a position to actually do that.

Now, as Bible-believing Christians, we don't go along with this kind of madness. We recognize that there is a standard. We recognize that there is truth and that our lives ought to be governed by that truth.

And we recognize also that our thinking ought to be directed by that truth. Indeed, that it should even affect our emotions, but primarily it affects our minds, and then our minds are given, we might say, the priority over our emotions.

[6 : 21] You know, you think about a situation where you find yourself suddenly in a situation where something unexpected has happened. And, you know, you might react emotionally to begin with.

And then, after a few moments, you stop yourself and you say to yourself, well, okay, I understand why I reacted in that way emotionally, but it's not the reasonable way to respond to this.

And then you bring your emotions under control. You try to anyway. And then you respond to it differently from that point on. And, you know, it's reasonable and sensible and indeed, I think, biblical for us to actually seek to have that, have our minds have that position in our experience so that we don't give ourselves over to emotionalism.

You know, there are plenty Christians who do give themselves over to emotionalism. There are branches of Christianity where that is essentially the norm. But, we don't think that that is really what the Bible teaches.

And, what we see here in Colossians chapter 3 is very much that our thinking, our frame of mind, everything about how we respond to life around us ought to be shaped by what we understand about the truth of God.

[7 : 56] So, these verses at the beginning of Colossians chapter 3 really instruct us to set our minds on the things that are above, the spiritual things, the glorious truths that the Scripture set before us.

We notice here that they are to be comprehended through the mind primarily. Set your mind upon these things.

We are to receive these truths. We are to process them through our minds. and yes, the Spirit is involved, our Spirit, each of our spirits, as it were, is involved in that and the work of the Holy Spirit interacts with us in that and enabling us to grasp these truths.

But we are primarily to engage with these through our minds. And so, if we are to be truly spiritual, then our minds and our thinking need to be shaped by the spiritual truths and realities that are in Christ, that are said before us in the Scriptures.

Now, there are two words here that are pointing us in this direction, two imperatives. The first is to seek and then to set your minds upon this.

[9 : 39] Now, the first of these indicates the need to make this a priority and not to rest until we lay hold of these things and indeed these truths lay hold of us.

The other, the second of these imperatives indicates that the mind is central to this. It could be translated in a more literal manner, be minded about the things on high.

It's not, it's a bit clumsy in English, but I think it helps to communicate a little bit of the idea that is expressed here. This word also would seem to point towards the transformation of the mind, the mind being shaped by these truths, our frame of mind being formed through being set upon and considering and grasping these truths.

So, how are we to set our minds on these things? things? Well, the Lord has provided for us means to that end.

Firstly, we might say we are to read the Scriptures. It's a pretty basic thing to say, but it's very important. Secondly, we are to hear these Scriptures preached and expounded and explained.

[11 : 11] We might kind of extend that also to reading books, etc., that help us to better comprehend the truth of God's Word.

Thirdly, we are to discuss these matters with our fellow believers, to have fellowship in the gospel. And fourthly, we are to pray through these matters.

prayerfully thinking through these truths and how they apply to our lives. You might think of Psalm 1 and how the psalmist speaks there of the person who is blessed being the person who meditates or ruminates upon God's Word, prayerfully going over these truths in their hearts and minds, so that they lay hold of these truths and indeed these truths shape who they are and how they respond to

the world around them.

And the order I have there isn't random. The ultimate authority, of course, is God's Word. Lord, you know, I have to come to a clear understanding of that through the assistance of the church.

That's part of the reason that the church exists, is that we will be able to assist one another in these matters. Of course, we have the Holy Spirit to assist us, but we also have been given one another, and we have been given those who have particular gifts to help and assist the church in laying hold of these truths, ministers and missionaries, evangelists.

[13 : 09] And of course, Scripture is not something that is to be interpreted according to our own private interpretation either.

And so the church plays an important role in that regard, helping us to understand together how these truths apply to us.

Of course, sometimes how it applies to us can be a very private matter. That's a different thing. the Scriptures may challenge us on very private issues that maybe no one else knows about, and that's fine.

That's supposed to be like that, you might say, in a certain way, but how we interpret the Scriptures, it's not to be our way and everyone else's wrong.

That's surely not how it's supposed to be. We are supposed to come together in this and to recognize the truths of God's Word together. That helps to keep us right, to keep us balanced in our focus upon God's Word and our thinking about God's Word.

[14 : 21] So, hopefully that's helpful in terms of thinking about this in a practical way, the practical ways in which we can begin to set our minds upon these things, to set our minds on the things that are on high, the things that are heavenly, the things indeed that are helpful and beneficial for our souls.

Now, we don't set our minds on things that are vague and without form. This isn't about speculating about spiritual things that no one really has any clear concept of.

that kind of vagueness is really not very helpful. What is in mind here is something where there is significant clarity.

This isn't mindless meditation. And I kind of hesitate to use the word meditation anyway because there are so many ways of thinking about meditation and I guess Eastern meditations become very popular and it tends to be fairly mindless.

Like some of the classic stuff is basically trying to empty your mind. And that's not biblical and that's not what is intended here. This is aimed at filling our minds with what is good and beneficial for our minds and for our souls.

[15 : 55] You know, when people open themselves up to things like Eastern meditation, they can have bizarre spiritual experiences and sadly, some can come under demonic influence as well.

Paul is instructing us here to set our minds on very definite things so that we will better understand and grasp them and that these may lay hold of us and transform our lives, that they may have that transformative effect in our lives by God's grace.

The first verse here in this chapter firmly sets out for us the general focus here that our thoughts are to have.

And the general focus is to be focused upon Jesus Christ, to be focused upon who He is for us and who we are in Him.

All that we have in the heavenly places, all these things are ours in Christ. And so Christ must ultimately be the focus of our thoughts on heavenly things.

[17 : 13] We're not encouraged to focus on peripheral matters, things that there's maybe something to anchor our thoughts on, but people can then kind of branch out in terms of all kinds of speculation.

For instance, you know, we know that angels exist and we know they have particular roles, but, you know, people can get into all kinds of speculation about angels and types of angels and all kinds of things that angels might be involved in.

But that's not really what's said before us here. What's said before us here is Christ. Ultimately. And to focus in upon what Christ has done for us and how He is at work in us and how He is leading us on in His ways.

You know, we can think about Paul himself. You know, he was carried up to the third heaven. He had experiences that were beyond our comprehension pretty much.

yet, He didn't speak of these things. He didn't dwell on these things. He mentions it once in His writings. As far as I recall, it's just the once He mentions it.

[18 : 33] The rest of the time, and I suppose I should also say that when He does mention it, He's speaking of the thing as though He's speaking almost like a madman to actually even mention these things, what He is focused on the whole time is Christ.

He wants to exalt Christ in the lives of the believers. He wants Christ to be exalted in their minds. He wants nothing else beyond that.

Nothing else that is disconnected from that. Of course, that encompasses a whole, a huge range of thought and activity, but it's all focused upon Christ.

Now, sometimes people may have amazing experiences. They may not be of the kind of order of being carried up to the third heavens, but, you know, the Lord does do astounding things sometimes in our experience.

And, you know, it's so easy, though, in sharing about something like that, that we can glory in it ourselves rather than seek to magnify Christ in that.

[20 : 00] And that's something we should be wary of. We should be careful that if we do share some of these amazing things, that we're really careful to exalt Christ through that and not seek to exalt ourselves, because it's a very natural tendency in ourselves as fallen sinful human beings to actually do that.

And we can easily fall into that. But we are being encouraged here to have this clear focus upon Jesus in all that we do, in all that we think, in all that we say.

so our minds are to be set upon the things that are heavenly, the things that are above, rather than the things of the world.

And it's a very pertinent question in that connection to ask ourselves, what does take up our minds? What does fill our thoughts?

what is it that captivates our thinking, captures our imagination, fills our minds? Now, of course, we recognize we have to think about things in this world.

[21 : 13] We have to think about providing for our families. We have to think about our education, if we're at that stage. We have to think about all kinds of things that happen in this world.

But that's not really what Paul is aiming at. He's aiming primarily at things that are worldly in the sense of things that tend to draw us away from Christ.

Now, I guess anything can fall into that category, but there are particular things that kind of fall into this kind of description, things like greed and lust and envy, things that kind of carry our hearts away from the Lord and the things that pertain to Him.

So, Paul isn't saying that we have to wander around like in a cloud and not really engage with the world around us.

That's not what he's saying. He's saying, I mean, look at Paul's life. That's clearly not what he's saying. I mean, Paul was one of the most engaged people around.

[22 : 18] He was tremendously engaged in the world around him in reaching out with the gospel. And, of course, at times we see that he even had to do things like in certain situations he was working doing tent making because that was his trade so that he wouldn't lay a burden on the churches he was serving.

We see a very practical mindset there as well that is evident. But he is absolutely caught up with Jesus. This is what consumes his thinking.

It drives his life. Everything that he does is focused upon Jesus Christ. And that's really what he's driving at here.

He wants the Colossian believers and everyone else who was to read this letter, he wants us also. He wanted anyone who read this and the Lord wants this as well.

It's his word after all. He wants us to be captivated by the wonder and the glory of Jesus so that our lives are Christ centered, so that our lives are driven with this passion, this drive, this longing to see him exalted, God, in us and in those around us.

[23 : 57] And Paul draws focusing upon three areas. I know this sermon is a little bit odd. It's a very long introduction and a relatively short three points at the end.

but please forgive me for kind of upending the structure of sermons but it's just the way it seemed to come out.

He wants us to set our minds on the glory of our life raised in Christ. Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. God, we see here then that we're called to focus our attention on this aspect of what Christ has done for us, namely that we have been raised with him.

What exactly does this mean? The primary focus that Paul seems to have here is on our being raised to new life in Jesus. through the power of the resurrection, what we might term spiritual resurrection.

[25 : 14] This is ours through faith on account of Christ's death, resurrection, and ascension. what we are to think about in this connection is that we are to consider how the finished work of Christ has been applied in our lives, to meditate on that, and how he has brought life into existence spiritually in our experience, how he has given us that, and how he maintains that.

Thinking of the necessity of Christ's atoning death for that to happen. Thinking about his ongoing intercession on our behalf as he maintains that.

We can think of the wonder and the glory of his work. A work that is perfect in spite of our imperfections and our sins and our failures.

It's an amazing encouragement to us even just to simply recount to ourselves how God has worked in our lives. To remember how he's worked in our lives in the past.

You know, especially sometimes we can find ourselves kind of struggling and a bit down and saying to ourselves, is God at work in my life just now?

[26 : 55] We might find ourselves in that kind of situation at times. And in that situation it's such an encouragement for us to think back and to remember how the Lord has actually worked in our lives.

How he has applied his salvation in our lives and how he has brought us through difficulties and challenges in the past. And if you haven't yet experienced this reality in your life, if you've not yet trusted in his resurrection power to grant you newness of life, if you don't know for certain that you belong to Jesus, this, then I would encourage you to seek until you find.

To seek after this with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength because there is nothing more important than to know that we are in him.

To know that his salvation is a reality in our experience. it may be that what hinders that is that you're unwilling to acknowledge sin in your life, things that the Scriptures have made it very clear are against the will of God.

And until we acknowledge that, then we will not know that salvation. We can't know that salvation until we come to that point because we reject it as long as we say, I don't need to repent of this sin, which means basically, I don't need a Savior.

[28 : 40] Why would I need a Savior for this? I don't think there's anything wrong with doing this, that, or the next thing, even though the Scriptures say these things are against the will of God. God. If you're in that situation, then the Lord is calling you to no longer trust in your own righteousness because the Scriptures are very clear on that.

There's no one righteous, no not one. The only righteous human being that walked this earth after the fall of Adam was Jesus Christ, fully righteous, without sin.

Everyone else, even the best of the saints that we see in the Scriptures, we see that they have their failings. But Jesus is our perfect Savior, and He is able to save.

But He has not come to save the righteous, but the sinner. And so, this truth, must be accepted if we are to know salvation.

Because otherwise, we're saying, Jesus didn't need to die for me. We can't know salvation if we're saying that. We're encouraged also to set our minds on the glory of our life hidden in Christ.

[30 : 13] for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Now, I think the focus that Paul has changes slightly here.

Although, in the previous couple of verses, there's this idea of that state of death that we find ourselves in.

This verse, I think, recognizes that there's something that happens when salvation comes, and it really ties in with what we've just been thinking about in terms of recognizing our sin.

We come to a point where we recognize that we have died to our own righteousness. And at that point, that's a point where we really come to trust.

We trust in the righteousness of Christ, just like Robert Murray McShane did as we sang in the hymn earlier. We come to trust in the righteousness of Jesus instead of our own.

[31 : 20] And in that way, we die to our own righteousness. And our life, at that point, is hidden with Christ.

Now, what does that mean? Well, it means that our life is safe in him. It's committed to him. You know, if a person of great wealth goes to stay in a fancy hotel somewhere, like say some billionaire goes to Monaco, and they have this piece of jewelry, they're probably not going to keep it in their hotel room.

But in that hotel, there'll be a safe, because these, I mean, every hotel probably has a safe to one degree or another, but these big fancy hotels are proper safes, where these kinds of things can be sequestered and kept safe for the duration of that person's stay.

And that kind of imagery, I think, is helpful in thinking about how our life, when we commit ourselves to Christ, when we come to know his salvation, our life is safe in him.

[32 : 39] It's hidden in him. It's kept for eternity. In other words, it can't be lost, because he keeps it in perfect safety.

No matter what might happen about us, around about us, even though we might suffer persecution and even be put to death, our life in Christ is perfectly safe.

We cannot lose that. Our enemies could slay the body, but they simply cannot slay the life that we have in Christ.

That's impossible. And that's what Paul is focusing in on here. the safety that we have in him, the glory of that.

Because that gives us a confidence when we lay hold of that that enables us to live for Christ in a way that we simply couldn't do if we didn't have that confidence.

[33 : 44] I'm not saying that we're going to go on to immediately lay our lives down as martyrs, but that wouldn't even be a possibility if we didn't have this assurance, if we didn't have this certainty, this knowledge of our safety in him.

And then lastly, he encourages us to set our minds on the glory of our life to be revealed in Christ. When Christ to us, your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

This verse expresses how bound up our life is with Christ. He is our life. Outside of him there is only death. But he has bound his people to himself in blessing and in glory, and his ultimate purpose is to bring each of his people into the full enjoyment and experience of that in his presence, to dwell with him forever in fullness of glory and blessing and joy.

The Scriptures use the image of the marriage feast to give expression to this glorious, awaited reality, the glorious bride adorned for her husband, the church, God's people.

Now, there are many folk stories which take this kind of theme. The young woman of humble origins upon whom the prince sets his love, and she's exalted to a place of glory.

[35 : 21] We see something similar in the Scriptures. One place, and there are many places where this kind of imagery is expressed, but one place that comes to my own mind frequently is Psalm 113, which speaks of us being lifted up from the ash heap and exalted as princes among his people.

This is his purpose. He purposes to grant glory to his people, a glory that they know in him.

But we also see in Revelation, this becomes very clear, when they experience that, all they want to do is to reflect that glory back to Jesus.

We see that great imagery of the crowns being cast at his feet. That great longing to exalt him comes to the fore. So, may the Lord enable us to have that same heart and mind, that same desire, that Jesus would be exalted in our lives, that he would be exalted in our hearts and minds, that he would be exalted in the way that we live, that he would be exalted in all that we do, that we would know and lay hold of something of his glory, and that we would long to see him glorified and honored.

Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we pray that you would help each one of us to further meditate on these truths. we sometimes feel like we're paddling around at the edge of the ocean of your glory, and that has to be true in a sense, but we pray that you would help us to know and to grasp more and for it to shape our lives more and more and to redound to your glory more and more in our lives.

[37 : 32] And may we be truly captivated by the wonder of who you are and all that you have done for us. We pray these things in Jesus' name.

Amen.