

AM Colossians 3:1-4 You're dead!

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[0 : 00] Let's hear now from the Bible, two readings, and the first is the reading that I just mentioned in the children's talk from Matthew chapter 6.

! Matthew 6 and verses 19 to 34. Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal.

But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. The eye is the lamp of the body.

So, if your eye is healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness.

[1 : 20] If then the light in you is darkness, how great is that darkness. No one can serve two masters.

For either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and money.

Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on.

Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? Look at the birds of the air. They neither sow, nor reap, nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them.

Are you not of more value than they? And which of you, by being anxious, can add a single hour to his span of life?

[2 : 28] And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow. They neither toil nor spin, yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these.

But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith?

Therefore do not be anxious, saying, what shall we eat or what shall we drink or what shall we wear? For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all.

But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself.

Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. We turn over now for our second reading, the passage that we'll be looking at later on, which is Colossians chapter 3 and verses 1 to 4.

[4 : 00] If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Set your mind on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Well, may God speak to us through his word.

Let's bow together again now in prayer. Well, let's turn now to the word of God, and those verses that we read in Colossians 3.

Over the course of quite a few months now, whenever I've been preaching here on Sunday mornings, we've been going through Colossians, just a very short portion this morning, verses 1 to 4.

[5 : 26] I'll read again verse 1. If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

We have here one of the most extraordinary doctrines in the Bible, our union with Christ. In the space of four verses, Paul tells us that we have risen with Christ, we have died with Christ, our life is hidden in Christ, and we will appear in glory with Christ.

And he draws the conclusion that we should be heavenly minded, because that is where Christ is.

If you'd never met these thoughts before, you might think that Paul had gone mad. He actually says in verse 3, you have died.

Really? You think we might have noticed. When I was a child, not long after the war, boys used to play at being soldiers.

[7 : 04] They would run around pretending to shoot each other, and they would say, you're dead. That's what Paul is saying here.

You're dead. But this is no game. He is absolutely serious. He's speaking, of course, of our spiritual union, the union between us and Christ, as believers.

We are united in such a way that his experience becomes ours, including his death and resurrection.

And we should notice that this should change our lives. I want us to consider this morning first that spiritual union, and then the spiritual outlook that results from it.

First, let me remind you of the background. It's seven weeks since my last sermon on Colossians, so you may perhaps have forgotten.

[8 : 26] Colossae was a town in Asia Minor, in what is now Turkey, about 120 miles east of Ephesus. Paul is writing to encourage them and to warn them against certain heresies that were spreading in that region.

He wants, above all, to exalt Christ. The supreme encouragement is knowing who Christ is and what he's done for us.

And the supreme answer to all heresy is the truth as it is found in Christ. He's spoken of Christ back in chapter 1 from verse 15 onwards as the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of creation, the head of the church, through whom God has reconciled us to himself, making peace by the blood of the cross.

chapter 1 verse 27, he's spoken of Christ in you, the hope of glory. Chapter 2 verse 3, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him.

Chapter 2 verse 9, in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily and you have been filled in him. Some translations have you are complete in him.

[10 : 05] And therefore he warns us not to be deceived by those who say you need something extra. Don't be deceived by empty philosophy, he says.

Don't imagine that you need to be circumcised or go through any other Old Testament ritual. Don't be deceived by those who say you need to worship angels.

Apparently there was an angel cult in Colossae. Or by those who insist on asceticism, treating your body with severity.

That was the note on which we ended last time. Now he's telling us how we should live.

And he roots it in our relationship with Christ. So let's look then at our spiritual union with Christ. The Bible teaches quite clearly that as Christians we are united with Christ.

[11 : 17] We don't merely believe in Christ. we don't merely follow Christ. We are united with him. That idea goes back to Jesus himself in John 15.

I am the vine, you are the branches. Branches receive their life from the vine. If they should become separated from the vine then they would die.

Paul develops this idea in many places. Romans 6 for example. Do you not know that all of us who have been baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into his death?

We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father we too might walk in newness of life.

Dead buried and risen again with Christ. Galatians 2 20 he says I have been crucified with Christ.

[12 : 34] It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me. It's an old song that says were you there when they crucified my Lord?

the answer actually is yes. As Christians we were there in him even before we were born we were in Christ in the plan of the Father and he was dying for us and we died with him.

again Ephesians 2 verse 5 God made us alive together with Christ by grace you have been saved and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus he's already done that he says you've ascended with Christ you're with Christ in heaven don't often think of things that way do we?

but that's what the Bible says he's spoken of it already here in Colossians chapter 2 verse 6 as you have received Christ Jesus the Lord so walk in him verse 11 in him you were also circumcised verse 12 we have been buried with him in baptism in which you were also raised with him verse 13 you who were dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh God has made alive together with him having forgiven all our trespasses and in verse 20 if with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world why as if you were still alive in the world do you submit to regulations do not handle do not taste do not touch so it wasn't a new idea for these

Colossians he's not springing on them something new this is a basic part of Paul's teaching now there are as I've said four ideas here raised with Christ died with Christ hidden with Christ glorified with Christ first you have been raised with Christ we might wonder why Paul starts with resurrection rather than death but there are no chapter divisions in the original and the train of thought here actually begins back in chapter 2 verse 20 if with Christ you died to the elemental spirits of the world now he continues if you have been raised with

[15 : 44] Christ the order is perfectly logical as you'd expect with Paul being raised from the dead is one of several remarkable ways in which salvation is described in the New Testament we've been born again we're a new creation we've been brought from darkness to light from the kingdom of Satan to the kingdom of God these are all ways of describing the tremendous change that comes upon us when we become Christians too often we think of it in the simplest of terms we've believed in Jesus yes we've done that we're followers of Jesus yes we're following him but the Bible wants us to see things in a bigger way than that born again a new creation darkness to light a tremendous change has taken place in us and what could be greater than being raised with

Christ resurrection speaks of the new life that we have in Christ we were dead in our trespasses and sins we had no awareness and no interest in the things of God no power to live a godly life but now all that has changed we've been raised from the dead and the things of God now are vividly real to us and we have both the desire and the power to live godly lives and Paul links this with the resurrection of Christ himself we've not merely been raised but raised with Christ it is his resurrection life that we have within us one day the bible tells us we will be raised physically from the dead but already we have been raised spiritually from the dead now the resurrection of Christ was a mighty work of

God and this spiritual resurrection is also a miracle it's not something that we could do for ourselves it's the work of God and we praise him for it we'll come back later to the response at the end of verse 1 and in verse 2 but for now let's go on to the second way in which we're united with Christ in verse 3 you have died the implication being died with Christ now I can see how this might be a little confusing we were dead in trespasses and sins and Christ has raised us but now he says you died and clearly it's a positive thing you were dead and that was a bad thing but now you have died and that's a good thing well which is it were we dead already or have we died well both as regards the things of God we were dead by nature and we needed to be raised but as regards the things of the world we were very much alive and we needed to die we know this is

Paul's meaning from the context in verse 2 where he says not to set your mind on the things of the earth that's what you used to do when you were alive to these things in your former life as it were before you became a Christian but now you have died to the world it is underlining in fact what he said back in chapter 2 verse 20 where he said that you have died to the elemental spirits of the world now that doesn't mean that the world means nothing to us we still appreciate the world as God's creation we appreciate all the beauty of the world we enjoy all the good things of this world maybe more than ever because we're seeing them with new eyes as the old hymn says heaven above is softer blue earth around is sweeter green something lives in every hue

Christless eyes have never seen Jesus himself expresses appreciation of the beauty of the world in that Matthew 6 passage when he speaks of the lilies of the field the beauty of them even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these we walk past flowers every day and don't even give them a second thought Jesus did this is my father's handiwork and how wonderful it is we still enjoy these good things of the world but the point is we're no longer held captive by the world it no longer means everything to us as once it did and we've positively rejected the evil things of this world and the sins that we were once addicted to and this too is the result of our union with Christ Paul says in

[21 : 56] Galatians 6 verse 14 far be it from me to boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by which the world has been crucified to me and I to the world I'm dead to the world for the Christian the past is past or at least it should be the old me is dead and buried and it will not be raised we've begun a new life and the old life is gone thirdly he says your life is hidden with Christ in God not only does your past conversion depend on Christ but your present life depends on him as well he's the secret source of all spiritual life we're alive in him and we have no life apart from him being hidden with Christ means that we're safe in him in the world it's the word that we would use for a hidden treasure our Lord himself uses it in the parable of the treasure hidden in the field we don't have many treasures at home but wealthy people who do sometimes have them locked up in a safe hidden away out of sight out of reach unless you have the code so likewise with us our spiritual life is locked away with Christ perfectly safe he is in heaven where could possibly be safer and as if that weren't enough he adds that Christ himself is in God a kind of double security back in chapter 2 he said that all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ well Christ regards you as another treasure and you're safe in him being hidden also means of course that the world can't see our spiritual life hopefully they can see the fruit of it but they can't see the life itself and in that sense we're a mystery to them but one day that mystery will be revealed and that's the fourth kind of union glorified with him in verse four when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory that's the ultimate result of our union with Christ that we will be with him at his second coming

Christ is our life now Paul says continuing the thought of verse three he is the source of our life he is the centre of our life the psalmist says whom have I in heaven but you and there is none on earth I desire beside you but something greater lies ahead we shall appear with him in glory Paul speaks elsewhere Romans 8 19 of the whole creation waiting for the revealing of the sons of God waiting as it were with bated breath for this tremendous event that is to take place in the future what a day that will be our eyes on that day will be of course on Christ will be completely enraptured with him Paul says elsewhere that he comes on that day to be glorified in his saints and to be marveled at among all who have believed this is the day of his appearing but nonetheless we will be with him and we will share in his glory

John says beloved we are God's children now and what we shall be has not yet been revealed but we know that when he appears we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is now what should our response be to all this let's look now at the spiritual outlook that should result from this go back to the end of verse 1 if then you have been raised with Christ if all this is a reality for you seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God set your mind on things above not on the things of the earth as Christians we should have a different outlook on life different from what it used to be and different from the attitude of the world a spiritual outlook or perhaps

I should say a spiritual up look our main concern should not be with earthly things but with heavenly things heaven is where Christ is having ascended into heaven he is now seated at the right hand of God he is our king our desire should be toward him to please him and to do his will in the world Jesus himself speaks of this spiritual outlook in Matthew chapter 6 as we read earlier do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal for where your treasure is there your heart will be also tells us not to be anxious about the things of this world but rather seek first the kingdom of

God and his righteousness and all these things will be added to you the things of this world still matter of course and we must do or we have to provide food and drink for ourselves and our families but the things of God should be our first priority the things of this world will fade away moth and rust destroy thieves break through and steal the may add that even those beautiful lilies of the field will fade away there are not many flowers left in our gardens now in October are there the leaves and the trees are beginning to fall and we ourselves are fading away as we get older Isaiah says all flesh is grass all its beauty like the flower of the field the grass withers the flower fades but the word of our

[29 : 52] God endures forever indeed all heavenly things will endure forever Paul speaks of seeking heavenly things setting our minds on them that requires some effort on our part you see our eyes by nature droop downwards we have to actually lift our eyes to the things of heaven seeking heavenly things means looking for them and trying to obtain them like the merchant in the parable seeking precious pearls setting our mind on them means having a heart desire and a fixed determination to obtain them our eyes should be looking upward not downward that means in practice living godly lives in obedience to the king our eyes are upon him we seek to promote his kingdom we praise him every day of our lives and we long for his return heavenly mindedness doesn't mean living in a dream world detached from the earth you sometimes hear about someone that they're so heavenly minded they're of no earthly use well that can happen but more often heavenly minded people are the most useful people in this world because our great principle is your will be done on earth as it is in heaven whereas the world thinks only of the earth our eyes are upon heaven and

Christ the king of heaven so let me ask you as we close is this true of you some perhaps may need to go back to that very first word in verse one if if you have been raised with Christ everything else in these four verses depends on that if what if you haven't I don't want to undermine anyone's faith by asking that question we know that Satan loves the word if said to Jesus repeatedly if you are the son of God questioning it when it was undoubtedly true I don't want to cast doubts where there are none there are no doubts here these Colossians were Christians Paul isn't questioning it he's just drawing out the logical conclusion but if there's no evidence then it is legitimate to ask the question if the things of this world mean everything to you if the things of heaven seem vague and nebulous and are of no real interest to you well then we have to ask have you really been born again if all this talk about union with

Christ means nothing to you if it's not just difficult to grasp but completely meaningless if this is not your experience then you are not yet saved and if that is the case then you need urgently to come to Christ come to him for salvation trust him as your saviour and your lord and then these things will become a reality to you but most of you I'm sure you are saved are you living in a way consistent with your faith are you seeking!

things above is your mind set on the things of heaven it's so easy to let our eyes slip from heaven to earth the old song says turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will look strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace all too often our eyes wander and it's the things of the earth that hold our attention and it's Christ who grows strangely dim and fades into the background that's sometimes very evident in our conversation think carefully what you talk about over coffee will you immediately talk about your health your holidays all good important things but isn't there something more important you want to talk about so easy to become earthly minded what is the remedy look upwards remind yourself from the

Bible of all that Christ has done for you redeeming you by his blood on the cross rising again and returning to heaven for you interceding for you watching over you and one day returning for you marvel at this doctrine of union with Christ just think what it means for dust and ashes to be united with the eternal!

[35 : 48] God for a sinner like yourself to be forgiven and brought into union with Christ sometimes in the Bible this union with Christ is described in terms of a marriage imagine some poor girl who has got mixed up in bad company and has somehow ended up in prison and a prince comes and asks her to marry him what an amazing thing to happen won't she be thinking forever more why me why would he choose me why does he want me to come and live with him I'm not worthy no you're not but that prince has chosen you and so it is with our union with

Christ no you're not worthy none of us are but the prince of glory has chosen us and brought us into this everlasting union and we can only marvel at it why such love to me in the light of that love live your life to the glory of God and of the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you may that become the reality in all of our lives Amen