

The Christ-Centred Life - Thinking Straight

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[0 : 0 0] Well, if you've been coming to church more than once today, that is if you came in the morning, you'll notice there's a common theme tonight. That is I want to start this Bible talk by asking you to do some reflection.

You might even want to close your eyes, think about what you've done this week and so on. But what I want you to do is think about some of the events and feelings that have shaped this last week or two for you.

And you know the things that I mean, the ordinary things. The things you do day by day. Things that have happened to you in the normal course of your week.

Just think back to the last week and what's happened. The way you've related to God, if you have. The way you've related to your spouse, if you have one.

Or your child. Or your parents. Or the people you live with. All of us have got people that fit into one or two of those categories. Reflect on the way you've gone about preparing your daily work.

[1 : 0 9] Or perhaps think about what ministry you might have been involved in. Think about how you've used your time this week. And as you've just thought about some of those things and caught some of them up in your mind.

What are the things that give you joy? What are the thoughts as they flash through your mind that embarrass you? And you think, I do wish that one hadn't happened.

What are the things that shame you? Are there things that have happened this week that you're angry with?

That is, either angry at yourself or angry at someone else. What are the things that really have made life for you this last week or so?

Now, if you can do this. This exercise is a bit quick because it's very rapid. But it's a good exercise to do every now and then. It's often what we'll do as we want to think about our relationship with God.

[2 : 1 9] I want you to ask yourself, what of these events, thoughts, feelings, and your reactions to them, what do they say about you? And who you are?

And what you're like? And what motivates you? So if someone were researching you as a person and could look into your life, your mind, your motivations and feelings, it's a bit awesome to think that someone might be able to do that, isn't it?

But what would they find out about you? And the reason that I ask all of this is that in many ways, I think this is the question being addressed in Paul, by Paul in Colossians 3, 1 to 4.

I think he's talking about who we are, what we're like, what life is like for us, what we are as people, what shapes us, what motivates us, what's our past, our present, our future.

So now, with that in mind, pick up your Bible, have a look at it with me, Colossians 3. But I want to just recall the context of this passage. You see, if you look in Colossians 2, remember Colossians 2, 6 and 7, which we've kept coming back to this last couple of weeks, that passage we saw is a central passage in the book of Colossians.

- [3 : 44] And unless we see how this passage today, Colossians 3, 1 to 4, fits into the rest of Colossians, it's going to be pretty hard to understand the book as a whole. I want you to look back to chapter 2, verses 9 to 14.
- And look at what it says, and listen to what it says. Verse 9. For in Christ all the fullness of deity dwells in bodily form, and in Christ you have been brought to fullness.
- He is the head over every power and authority, and in him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands.
- Your whole self, ruled by the flesh, was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead.
- Now, when you were dead in your sins and in the circumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ, and he forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us.
- [5 : 00] Well, he's taken it away, nailing it to the cross. It's quite a profound story of becoming Christian, isn't it? Now, look at verse 20. Paul says, Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of the world.
- Now, I want you to notice Paul's key ideas in these two passages. When you put them together, Paul talks about the state we were in. You see, he says, Look, we were dead.
- But he then says, Well, there's another new state into which you have come if you are Christian. Yes, we were once dead, but now, well, we have been raised.
- And both statements are statements about our state, either in the past or in the present. The state we were once in and the state we are now in, if we are Christians.
- Now, with that in mind, have a look at chapter 3. And I want you to look at verse 5. Paul says, Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.
- [6 : 08] Then flip down to verse 12. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourself with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience.
- Now, I wonder if you just noticed from the way what we've done, the difference between chapter 2 and chapter 3. It's quite profound when you think about it. In chapter 2, he talks about the state we were in.
- We were dead, but now we are alive. So, he's talking about our state, our situation, our standing. Once dead, now alive.
- But in chapter 3, he talks about something entirely different. He talks about the actions that we do in the real world. He talks about putting the state we are in into practice in the lives that we lead.
- Can you see that's quite a profound change? One, this is the state we once were in and the state we are now in. We'll now put into place the actions that befit your new situation, your new state.
- [7 : 17] We are to put the state that we are in into action. Well, we did that in the past, of course, didn't we? Before we were Christians, we put into practice the state we were in.
- We were dead to God, so we didn't live to God. But now we're alive to God, so now we live to God. And what does that look like and how does it affect us? Once when we were not Christians, we lived in a particular way, did certain deeds.
- Now that we are Christians, we live in a different way and do different deeds. the state we are in shapes the actions that we take. Now I want you to look at Colossians 3, 1 to 4.
- It is the part of the book that does this. It looks back to chapter 2 and looks forward to chapter 3. It's a sort of hinge on which the book swings, a pivot on which it turns.

Now let's take a look at it from a number of different perspectives. First, I want you to notice, have a look at verses 1 to 3, or 1 to 4. I want you to notice how Paul talks about our union with Christ in terms of past, present, future.

[8 : 22] Our past, our present, our future. Check it out in the passage. Look at the words with Christ or with him. Can you see them there? They talk about our union with Christ.

And look at the tenses associated with the language of with him and with Christ. So verse 1, Paul says, we have been raised with Christ.

That's a past reference, isn't it? That is, we were in one situation, but now we're in another. We have been raised with Christ. That happened in the past. Now look at verse 3. Paul says, our life is now hidden with Christ in God.

That's our present state. Now our life is hidden with Christ in God. If we are Christians, then at this very moment, that is now, our lives are hidden with Christ in God.

This very moment, that is our situation. That is what happens when we are united with Christ. Now look at verse 3 again.

[9 : 31] Look at the second half of the verse. Paul looks now forward to the future. When Christ, who is our life, he says, appears in the future, then we also will appear with him in glory.

Notice the with him again. So three with him, past, present, and now future. All are shaped by Christ. All are what happens when we are in union with Christ.

Our past is affected, our present is affected, our future is affected, and all are centred on us being bound up together with Jesus Christ. Now that we are Christians, Christ is the centre of all that we are and all that we do.

Our past, our present, our future. That's the first perspective. Friends, if you are Christians, you are with Christ. You were with him in the past, you are with him in the present and you will be with him in the future.

Christ is all in all to you. He now shapes every aspect of your existence, past, present, future. Now, let's dwell on the tenses just a little bit more.

[10 : 42] Let's see if we can explore what they mean. You see, although Paul uses the past tense here positively, we have been raised with Christ, we know that if we go back further than this, then the past is a pretty dark place.

Before we were united with Christ, our past was marked by trying to avoid God or to relate to him in ways that were unsatisfactory and unworkable. We could not relate to God.

He was foreign to our being. And if we'd kept on living that way, it would have led what? It would have led to death and alienation from God.

We would have died a terrible death. That is death spiritually to God and we were dead to him. And then we heard about a death, a different sort of death.

We heard about the death of Jesus on our behalf. And we realised that it was now possible to be related to God through Christ. Christ. And so we bound ourselves with Christ by believing in him.

[11 : 43] We said, I'm with you. I line up before you, with you. I am in you. And we died to the old ways of living, the old ways we'd tried of relating to God and we died to the old ways we'd tried of belonging to God.

And that resulted in a dramatic change to our lives. We made a drastic split with our old life. We died with Christ. And we rose to a whole new way of relating to God, a way of believing in what Jesus had done for us on the cross.

And so it was that by faith in God's power rather than our own, we were raised with Christ to a whole new way of living. That's our past.

We died with Christ. Christ. We were raised with Christ. But you see, we're not only people with a past, friends. According to Paul, we are people with a future.

And we have bound ourselves to Christ and we know, you tell me now, where is Christ now? Christ is seated with his Father in the heavenly places.

[12 : 55] He's seated with God there. And eventually, because we are in him, we are bound to him, we are with him, we also will appear there in glory.

But we aren't there yet, are we? Though we are bound up together with Christ, bound to him, we are with him, we're still very much on the earth, aren't we?

While he is seated at the right hand of the Father. The spiritual reality is that we are bound with Christ, but the physical hasn't yet, and visible, hasn't yet caught up with the spiritual.

And so we hope, don't we, if we're Christians, this is what we do, we hope for the time when we will not only know what it is to be spiritually where Christ is, but we'll experience what it is to be physically with him.

We will be there in the presence of God, in the presence of his Son, in the presence of all the people of God.

[14 : 02] So we hope for that time when that will be true. that's Paul's argument so far in these verses. We are Christians with a past. We died.

We have been raised spiritually with Christ, but we are also Christians with a future. Our life is now hidden with Christ in God. You know why it says it's hidden?

Because we don't actually often quite see it the way that it is. It's sort of like a hidden spiritual reality, and the people who walk down the street mightn't know it, but that's reality really.

Our life is hidden with Christ in God. So, so it was that we have been joined to him.

Now friends, we know that we will appear with him in glory, but Paul doesn't stop there. He goes on to tell us that this past, this future, can be brought together in the present. So let's focus on the present.

[15 : 00] Look at verses 1 and 2 again. Look at what Paul says. Since then, you have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

Friends, what is that spiritual reality? It is that we are already there spiritually with Christ. It'll happen later on, actually, where it won't just be a spiritual reality, but it will be actually a physical reality as well.

And he says, so set your mind on that. That's where you are. That's where spiritually you belong. So set your minds on it. Set your minds on the things above, not on earthly things. Now, set your hearts literally means seek.

Notice what Paul's saying. He's saying that when, that we are to be people who live in the world as people whose attitudes, choices, feelings, reactions, lifestyle are to be shaped by our union with Christ in the past, the present and the future.

And as we face life today, we are to actively choose to be people whose heritage is lived out in our daily life. That is, whose past, present, future, our eternal reality is lived out in the present, in our daily life.

[16 : 22] And let me explain by taking you back to the things that I got you to remember and reflect on when I first began. When you jump out of the bed in the morning or crawl out of bed in the morning or fall out of bed in the morning, who are you?

When you relate to your parents, your husband, your wife, your children, the people you live with, who are you? When you plan the activities of your day, who are you?

And when you sit down at work or study or whatever it is you do in the evening or watching television, who are you? Well, this passage is really clear, isn't it?

It's just crystal clear. You are a person who died with Christ. You are a person who has been raised to a new life with him.

You have one foot in heaven. You are spiritually in the very presence of God and before long you're going to actually be there physically, some of us before the others of us perhaps.

[17 : 40] But at the moment you've got another foot very firmly here on earth. what sort of activity, what sort of lifestyle involves a person like you who's spiritually bound to God?

That's clear, isn't it? You are to be who you are. Does that make sense? You are to be who you spiritually are. You are to be the one who died with Christ and was raised with him.

You are to be the one who will one day appear with Christ in glory. Let's put some real flesh on all of this. You are a person who has experienced God turning his anger away from your sin.

Friends, if you're a person that God has turned his anger away from, do you think you can look another person in the eye and be angry at them and hold a grudge at them if God has forgiven you, can you really not forgive others?

How can you store up anger and be unforgiving if you've been forgiven extraordinary things? You see, we're not to be like the rest of the world. We're Christians. We died.

[19 : 00] We were raised. We will be with Christ. We are not to be like the rest of the world. We are not to be like what we used to be like.

Our union with Christ has caused our minds to be set on the things above, on a God who forgives. So how can we not forgive? Therefore, we will forgive as we have been forgiven.

We will be full of grace even as God has been full of grace to us. We will choose to die to ungodly ways of responding. Instead, you see, we will choose to live in a godly way.

Let me choose another example. If you're God's person in Christ, then you're a person who has felt God's word about Jesus build you up rather than tear you down.

Is that not true? God has come to you in your life. He has spoken his word to you and that's built you up rather than tear you down. How can you then use your tongue to rip someone else apart in gossip about them?

[20 : 04] you're God's person. You're united with Christ. Your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Your past has been one of receiving grace and compassion from God.

Your future will be one of receiving even more from God. So how can you not bear with others even as God has borne with you?

How can you not forgive others even as Christ has forgiven you? How can you not love others even as God in Christ has loved you? I wonder if you can hear what this passage is saying.

It's very profound. Christ is our Lord. We are united with him. He is at the centre of our existence. Our lives are ruled by him. Our existence is ruled by him.

Every thought, every aim, value, aspiration, everything we strive at should come under his lordship. Every relationship is to be shaped by who he is and what he has done and what he will do for us.

[21 : 08] You see, the Christian choices for action are very clear. Seek the things above because that's where we belong. You see, we think in this world we belong here. No, it's not true. If we are Christian, we belong there.

Not only that, we belong to the past where Christ redeemed us. And we belong to him spiritually even now in the heavenly places. So we are to put the things to death that belong to this existence and to clothe ourselves with the things that belong to our future existence.

Friends, there's an immense pressure on us in our world, I think. That pressure is to become shaped by this world and its values and to become ensnared by its lures and its entanglements.

Christians, when I talk to some of the people in our congregations and elsewhere, they are far more shaped by the world's values than by God's values. Christian views of morality have shifted so that they are becoming increasingly like the world's values.

And Christians are becoming indistinct from the world. Why? Because they are setting their eyes on the world, not on the heavenly places, not on who they are in Christ, not on their union with Christ.

[22 : 28] We must resist the pressure of our world and instead be shaped by a higher kind of life. We Christians are to live in the world as those who are centred on divine things.

We offer a different way of making sense of reality. We live a different kind of life. We're not just sort sanitised other people.

We are transformed other people. A life shaped by the eternal realities that we've spoken about tonight and therefore a life which goes against the grain of nearly everything the world considers normal.

Friends, if you were truly Christian, if we were truly Christian in the way we lived, we would be extraordinarily unusual people in our world. this passage we've looked at tonight forms a springboard for everything that will follow and in the passages that follow, Paul gets down to the very nitty gritty of life, every day.

We've got the big principle here, as he goes on next week we'll see it all fleshed out a bit in the ordinary. And he demonstrates how the principles we learn here flow down into daily life.

[23 : 43] But let me tell you, you don't need to wait till next week. The principles Paul has given here can be applied to every area of life this week. As you live your life this week, focus on how you died with Christ.

Focus on how one day you are going to appear with Christ in glory. And focus on the fact that your life even now is hidden with Christ in God. And set your heart on these eternal realities, these truths, and let them shape you.

And let them shape the way you relate and the way that you live. Friends, it is in the every day that our union with Christ is to shape us. In our family life, in our work, in the office, in our relationships, in everything.

We are to be transformed by this. It's not just a neat little thing that we hide away to give us an assurance of heaven. That's a thing that transforms, the Christian faith is about transforming life in the ordinary, being a different person because of what God has done in Christ, and being different from everyone else in the world who does not know Jesus.

It is totally, totally radical in its transformation. For you once were dead, and now you are alive in Christ, and you are with him in the past, you have been with him in the past, you are with him in the present, and you'll be with him in the future, so live like it.

[25 : 22] That's what this passage is all about, so live like it, reflect that by setting your mind on those truths and living like it. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you that we died with Christ, that one day we'll appear with Christ in glory, and our life is now hidden with Christ in you.

Please help us to set our hearts, our minds, on these eternal truths. Please be at work amongst us by your spirit that these truths will shape us and shape the way we relate and live, and particularly Father, we pray for our everyday.

We pray for our family life, our relational life, our work, the places we live, our relationships.

We pray for every aspect of our life, that you would help us to work these truths down into that, and we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.