

Turn Your Eyes on Jesus

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Preacher: Rev David Court

[0 : 0 0] I hope you will excuse me because it is very warm in here this evening and I'd quite like to take my jacket off and so since none of you are stopping me I'm going to do just that not very good if I pass out in the middle of my sermon so I wonder if any of you have heard of a lady or woman called Lilius Trotter she was a gifted artist who gave up those prospects to become a missionary in Algeria and she served there for I think almost 40 years and amongst her many writings she produced a little tract that was called Focused and in that tract we find these words turn full your soul's vision to Jesus and look look at him and a strange dimness will come over all that is apart from him the hymn writer Helen Lamelle read those words and such was the impression that they had upon her heart that she composed the words of the song turn your eyes upon Jesus look full in his wonderful face and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of his glory and grace I think that's not a bad summary of Paul's message to the church at Colossae turn your eyes on Jesus the Colossian church was in all likelihood one that Paul had never visited its origin lay possibly in the ministry of Epaphras who is believed carried the gospel from

Ephesus where Paul had ministered for some time and the occasion of the letter is believed to be the emergence of a false teaching which was beginning to exert a detrimental influence on the Colossian church the teaching often known by scholars as the Colossian heresy nobody really knows what the Colossian heresy was there are lots of different theories I think there have been almost 50 different views propounded over the last hundred years or so and so I'm not going to bore you by going through those but whatever it actually was it clearly it was a real threat or at least Paul saw it as a real threat and so he determined to write to the Colossian church and to tackle the dangers that it presented most commentators believe that the catch word of the false teachers was the word fullness this was part of its appeal it offered a fuller a more complete a kind of upgraded Christianity and by implication it suggested that the gospel the Colossians had received was in some way deficient or lacking but the interesting thing I think for me is this not the nature of the Colossian heresy over which much ink has been spilt over the years but rather Paul's response to it the danger it presented was in effect I think the danger of all false teaching whatever we find it to lead us away from the absolute sufficiency of our Lord Jesus Christ and so Paul's antidote to the problems and difficulties of the church there was a fresh vision and focus upon Jesus and it strikes me that whenever the Holy Spirit does a significant work in the life of a church or in the life of ordinary believers it is always a Christ-centered work

Jesus is always at the heart of it and here in Colossians Paul seeks to expound the absolute sufficiency of the work of Jesus Christ and he seeks really a kind of spiritual renewal in their lives that is rooted in the person and work of Christ he wants to make sure that they don't lose contact with the one who is the head of the church he wants them to know that Christ is all and is in all he wants Jesus to be at the center of their life and their worship and their witness his message to them is this turn your eyes upon Jesus the great temptation isn't it whether in first century Asia Minor or 21st century Scotland is for us to take our eyes from Jesus to start looking elsewhere for meaning for satisfaction for success we may not be facing anything like the so-called Colossian heresy but we do face all manner of views and teachings and ideas and philosophies that will lead us away from Jesus Christ what a danger it is that we take our eyes from Jesus we may love our theology and we may love our preaching and we may be committed to the church and enjoy the doctrines of grace and desire holiness and love the Bible may want to see revival and yet if Jesus Christ himself is not at the center of those things we are simply wasting our time the jewel in the crown of Christianity is not an idea not a system not a philosophy a program not even the gospel as such it is the person of Jesus Christ lose sight of him and we lose sight of everything that is important that was the great danger in Colossae and I believe it is a great danger even today

T.H. Parker in his biography of Calvin says this keeping Christ in clear view was John Calvin's theological program and then he quotes a passage from Calvin's commentary on Colossians and he says this how comes it that we are carried about with so many strange doctrines but because the excellence of Christ is not perceived by us for Christ alone makes all other things suddenly vanish hence there is nothing that Satan so much endeavors to accomplish as to bring on mists with the view of obscuring Christ because he knows that by this means the way is open for every kind of falsehood this therefore is the only means of retaining as well as restoring pure doctrine to place Christ before the view such as he is with all his blessings that his excellence may be truly perceived turn your eyes upon Jesus

Calvin says elsewhere drink from no other fountain than Jesus Christ and so the great antidote laid out before us in the letter of the Colossians is none other than Jesus himself and that's what Paul does I think in chapter 1 he spreads out before his readers something of the glory and the splendor of Jesus Christ he wants them to see who he really is he wants their hearts to be filled with Jesus he wants their minds to be taken up with Jesus he wants their faith to be rooted in Jesus he wants them to be strengthened by a personal knowledge of this man Jesus Christ he wants them to turn their full gaze and attention upon him and now in these verses of chapter 3 he looks to unpack what it means for a man or a woman to be united by faith through the spirit to the Lord Jesus Christ and so his focus here is now upon how the life of Jesus Christ will be worked out in our own lives

[9 : 03] Christian life is not something abstract or theoretical it is something hugely practical and so the first thing that he says here is this consider who you are in Christ consider who you are in Christ and he says that really in the first four verses 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 minds on things that are above not on things on earth you've died your life is hidden with Christ in God when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him so what Paul is speaking about here is our new identity in Jesus Christ the expression in Christ is one that is descriptive of the believers union with him and though it's not the expression that he uses here with Christ and though it's not as extensively used as the phrase in Christ it conveys the same idea

Christ is to be a present reality in the life of every believer that's what it means to be a Christian it is to be a man or a woman in Christ it's the fundamental reality of our lives and it's the key thought of these verses previous chapter Paul speaks about being circumcised in Christ and buried in Christ now he speaks of having died and having been raised with Christ and he says that the true life of the believer is hidden with Christ in God he talks about appearing with Christ in glory and the interesting thing what he's speaking about here is something that has already happened these verses are not an exhortation for us to do something they're a description of what has already taken place in us through Christ the ultimate dynamic of the Christian life is this union with Jesus and it's very important that we grasp that everything that Christ has done now belongs to us our whole situation before God has radically altered a union has been forged between us and Jesus through the work of the spirit our lives have been fused to the life of Christ it's not just that Jesus has come into my life rather it is that I have been brought into his life we have been put into Christ united to him in his life death and resurrection a new identity has been forged if anyone is in

Christ he is a new creation now already in this letter Paul has spoken about the way in which believers have died with Christ you died he mentions it here again in verse 3 for you have died when we speak about death we do so to express communicate the end of something we talk about our hopes have died or how a friendship has died and what we mean is those things have come to an end when someone comes to Christ they die something comes to an end that old relationship with sin and guilt and the condemnation that it brings comes to an end that old way of life is no more in some communities it's the case when someone becomes a Christian the family hold a funeral service I remember that happening to a friend of mine who was converted to Christ from a

Jewish background sometimes a funeral notice is put in the paper as far as the family are concerned they're dead they're gone but in a sense that is true of all of us who are Christians our old life is gone our old identity is a thing of a past it was slaughtered and speared and buried with Christ and Paul says here we not only died with Christ we've been raised with Christ in newness of life our lives have been hidden with Christ and the world can't see that reality it's blind to it just as Christ's life and true identity are hidden so is ours our lives are hidden with him and God whatever happens to us in this world nothing can separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord and so one day we will appear says Paul verse 4 with Christ that hidden reality will one day be made known one day it will be revealed we shall share in his glory and triumph when at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow such is this union with Jesus

Christ that nothing can dislodge us from his loving embrace and so the New Testament tells us even when he returns in power and majesty and glory he will bring his people with him because we're joined to him we're a new creation the old has passed away behold the new has come and of course many of us I suspect can testify to that you know we were blind the Bible meant nothing to us singing singing in my context hymns in your context psalms a tasteless experience people of God seemed strange and odd and then we were born again we came to faith in Jesus and glorious new truths and realities began to grip our minds and our hearts and we became conscious of what

[15 : 21] Paul is speaking about here that the old man that is our union with the old Adam and all that it involved was brought to a halt the grip was broken it's not something small it's not something peripheral it's not something incidental something absolutely fundamental it's absolutely radical radical change in our lives that's what becoming a Christian is it's not oh well a small thing it's a massive thing and unless we understand this unless we see who we are in Christ and understand that we're in Christ then we will be unable to live out the Christian life because what sometimes happens is people try and live out the Christian life out of a fallen nature live as those in Adam rather than those who are in

Christ and so people can be very religious and they can be very moral and they can be all sorts of things but they can be far from Christ like you know we live in a culture don't we that's becoming confused about all sorts of issues of identity and that confusion is creating chaos in the lives of many people people no longer know who they are and yet what chaos and confusion sometimes exists in the church because we lose sight of who we are in Christ I had an experience last year where I received a bank statement that ran to a number of pages and it was a listed page after page of transactions with various internet betting sites and the statement appeared to reveal my secret gambling addiction thankfully I managed to explain it to my wife

Alison someone had stolen my bank card and with it my identity and let me tell you identity theft is no joke creates huge problems certainly created a few problems for me let me tell you and it's no less true in the church where Satan is busy engaging in identity theft leaving many believers with problems living out the Christian life with faithfulness and with joy understanding who we are in Jesus is fundamental to all of the Christian life actually much of pastoral ministry can be boiled down to reminding people who they are in Jesus it's because of all that they have in Christ that Paul here encourages readers to seek the things that are above verse 1 set your minds on things that are above verse 2 it says focus on the one who reigns above

Jesus Christ fix your affection upon him we set our minds and our hearts don't we upon those things that we love don't we it's what we do as human beings what is your mind set upon is it set upon Christ fill your heart with Jesus has his beauty and loveliness captured your affections Jonathan Edwards writes this the wicked the day of judgment will see everything else in Christ but his beauty and amiableness and he goes on to talk about Christ's divine loveliness and the fact this is what he says this sense of divine beauty is the first thing in the actual change made in the soul in true conversion and is the foundation of everything else belonging to that change wow so let me ask you you have any sense of the beauty and the loveliness of our Lord Jesus

Christ do you consider him precious do you delight in him do you desire him because at the heart of Christianity the Christian faith is this transforming relationship of love with Jesus the secret to godly living it's not some method or technique or discipline it's Jesus Christ all attempts at self improvement and moral reformation without Jesus are sin it matters who or what fills our vision it's not that we look at Jesus and then we go away and we try very hard to be like him we become like him by looking to him and thinking of him so Paul's saying set your minds on Jesus Christ and one of the great consequences of doing that will then be a desire to put away everything that is inconsistent with that new identity and that new life because we are in Christ we're called to live in a way that is consistent with this new reality and it's that which

[20 : 47] Paul turns to secondly in this letter in this chapter three of this letter a new life involves a new lifestyle and Paul speaks about this in the verses that follow this new lifestyle he says will involve some things being removed or put off and other things being embraced and put on and so the second thing that he says here verses five through eleven he says confront the old pattern of sin in your life the new life that we've received by virtue of our union with Christ involves us killing who we are not and becoming who we really are putting to death the practices of the flesh and putting on living in or becoming more like the new man and what Paul speaks of here in verses five through eleven sometimes it's called mortification speaks of how we're to deal with sin put it to death although we have this new identity a new life that does not mean that sin is no longer present the vestiges of our old Adamic nature remain and this new life has to be lived out in the midst of this old world this heavenly life has to be lived out in an all too earthly environment so it's a really important issue isn't it how do we deal with sin in our lives how do I deal with my anger or my sexual lust or my feelings of insecurity or my pride and what

Paul says here really is those things have to be confronted they mustn't be ignored trifled with they must be faced up to and ruthlessly dealt with and the foundation and the basis upon which we deal with sin is our relationship with Christ this new relationship this new life demands an all-out attack on the old life he says and these you too once walked verse 7 when you were living and then put to death he says what is earthly in you sexual immorality impurity passion evil desire covetousness which is idolatry these two you once walked when you were living in them must put them all away he says anger wrath malice slander obscene talk do not lie to one another saying that you've put off the old self with its practices and put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator notice he's saying here he's saying this new resurrection life demands that we remove the grave clothes of that old life these I remember when I was younger as a wee boy coming home from playing in the park playing football and I would come home and I would be somewhat messy and dirty and my mum would see me at the door and she would stand at the door we usually called in for tea or what's up or whatever she'd turn the door and she'd just take one look at us and she would say you're not coming in here like that that was what was said that was it so we usually had to divest ourselves of the football clothes before we even allowed in the house and that's the kind of picture here these things have to be put off because they're not fit to be worn in this new environment where we're united to Christ it's really important but it's really difficult because we live in a world that denies the reality of human sin a world that tells us that basically everybody's good you know we should have pound for every time I heard politicians or celebrities and film stars say just that I believe that everyone is basically good utter self deception I remember at CS Lewis's description of what he found within his own heart this is what he said a zoo of lusts a bedlam of ambition a nursery of fears a harem of fondled hatreds their name is legion or Martin

Luther at the time the time of the reformation I am more afraid of my own heart than of the pope and all his cardinals Robert Murray McShane wrote in his diary that he had discovered the seed of every known sin dwelling in his heart unfortunately this kind of perspective you see is disappearing even amongst evangelical Christians Professor MacLeod evangelical religion begins with a sense of sin we'll never produce evangelicals if we eliminate this emphasis evangelicalism is not first and foremost belief in an inerrant Bible it begins with a certain kind of self understanding the knowledge of our own guilt our own depravity our own alienation from God and that's what Paul describes in verse 5 put to death what is earthly in you sexual immorality impurity passion even evil desire covetousness which is idolatry and Paul says here that our idolatry is often revealed in our in sexuality sexual immorality impurity passion evil desire covetousness it's revealed in the the abuse distortion of the gift of sex wrenched from its original

God-given context of marriage sex becomes a commodity to be sold a vehicle for self fulfillment and self gratification and what a powerful idol it is in our own culture we're bombarded with sexual imagery day in and day out and what a temptation it presents prevalence of pornography reaching epidemic proportions the advent of mobile technology means that pornographic imagery can be not only accessed in secret but can be accessed anywhere any time any place no longer does a man have to you know reach for the top shelf magazine or enter a seedy shop simply switch on his phone it's all there how many bowing down at the secret altar of pornography and sexual immorality what a danger it is and we should be honest with ourselves and honest with others and honest with God we don't have to pretend that these temptations are not real let's not kid ourselves that such practices are not destructive of effective gospel witness and damaging to the church and its mission let's not sweep such things under the carpet but develop proper accountability and a brutal honesty because as Paul says verse 6 these things deserve the wrath of God sin is a serious matter and we need to see it from God's perspective not our cultures what we so often do is compare our sins with others usually those we consider to be far worse than ourselves and we are able to make ourselves feel quite good about our sin because it's not so bad could be worse sometimes we come across this view that sinners are not really that bad or deserving of God's wrath it's very dangerous thinking sin is an utter rejection of God in favour of something else and we see the seriousness of it don't we at the cross place of divine judgment and wrath it speaks to us of the serious nature of human sin how can we look at the cross of Jesus

Christ his broken body and his blood shed and still not understand how serious a matter it is how can we look at his nail pierced hands and still not see what sin does to a holy God it's vital that we see it for what it is these you too once walked now you must put them all away says Paul he goes on to say anger, wrath, malice, slander, obscene talk do not lie to one another since you have put off the old self and have put on the new self again these practices he says have to be put away and it's again very radical language that Paul uses sin is to be starved of the oxygen it needs it's to be utterly rejected and one of the interesting things I think here is that in this list of sins that Paul mentions it's not just the abuse of sexuality he also focuses on our speech anger, wrath, malice, slander so forth remember the words of Jesus what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart our tongues our tongues often reveal what's in our hearts our words are a window into our souls the kind of people we really are our words reveal to others a far deeper reality than sometimes we imagine what people say and the way that they say it often reveals the spiritual condition of the heart and the Christian fellowship is to be marked says Paul by unity he dwells in us all our brothers and sisters are to be embraced not shunned one of the ways

[30 : 59] I think and people are often often excluded and rejected is the way in which we speak about them I remember the old rhyme sticks and stones may break my bones but names will never hurt me what an absolute load of rubbish that rhyme is I much prefer Steve Turner's poem calls it sticks and stones this is how it goes sticks and stones only break your bones but words can tear your heart out isn't that true bones can and do heal but sometimes the wounds left by words don't they never heal and fall out from words spoken to us years ago can remain with us all our lives and some of you may know that words from childhood burned into your self-consciousness destructive words you're no good you'll amount to nothing I hate you I wish you'd never been born words from a destructive relationship that even today can still haunt you you're ugly you're stupid you can do nothing right you're useless how profoundly words can affect a person's life

I think it was Blaise Pascal who once said if all men knew what others said of them behind their backs there wouldn't be four friends in the whole world which one of us has not done it which one of us has never slandered someone behind his or her back this year this month this week this morning if we're going to deal with sin in our lives we need to unmask the idols we need to be brutally honest with ourselves and with one another and with God John Owen said of mortification you must always be at it while you live do not take a day off from this work always be killing sin or it will be killing you and I said this mortification this putting off this putting to death of sin is vital it's not the whole story though and as time disappears we'll quickly turn to the third thing here there needs to be the putting off of sin but also there needs to be the putting on of the clothes of Christ the old has to be displaced by the new and that's what

Paul speaks about in verses 12 through 17 he says clothe yourselves with Christ the point of getting rid of old patterns of behaviour is to make room for a new pattern the old is to be displaced by the new it's not just that some things are to be renounced other things are to be embraced and that involves us committing ourselves to a new lifestyle in which Jesus Christ reigns and reigns and so the way to progress in Christian living is not simply by fighting the old man but also by embracing the new man and that's really what Paul calls us to do here look what he mentions he talks about the love of Christ having to clothe our lives in verses 12 through 14 as God's chosen ones holy beloved put on compassion kindness humility meekness patience bear with one another if one is a complaint forgive each other as the Lord has forgiven you so you also must forgive above all these put on love which binds everything together in perfect harmony he's what he's really saying well look love has to be the hallmark of us as

God's people by this shall all men know that you're my disciples if you love one another love is to be our badge of discipleship not loving others to gain approval from them or from God or to earn our way into their favour it's lived out of the realisation that because Jesus has loved us because what if he has done for us we must love one another just as I have loved you you also are to love one another and this love is to show itself compassion and kindness and humility and meekness and patience and forgiveness that is how God himself has treated us as we have been forgiven so we're to forgive sometimes through the love of Christ we're called to let go of the hurt and the pain that others may have brought into our lives it involves us bearing with one another that means kind of putting up with one another I remember a story told it's a number of years ago now time disappears but I'm going to tell the story anyway years ago you remember when people smoked in planes you might remember that some of you people did used to smoke in the planes and on this occasion there was a plane and it's flying along and there was a guy who wanted to smoke a cigar he asked the steward he started to light up the steward came over and said look sir sorry we don't allow smoking cigars in this part of the plane you're allowed to do it if the person next to you agrees but otherwise you'll have to move up the back of the plane and so she asked the lady next and she said it's okay if this man smokes a cigar and she said well no not at all so she said well sorry sir you're going to have to move to the back of the plane and took him up the back of the plane and he was allowed to smoke his cigar there and afterwards the stewardess came down and she asked the lady if she was okay and the lady put her hand on the stewardess hand and she said you know she said

I've been married to that man for 30 years and I still can't stand a cigar smoke how hard it is sometimes to bear with others even those closest to us what's the old saying to live above with saints we love yes that would be glory to dwell below with saints I know well that's a different story but remember what Paul says here there is not Greek and Jew circumcised and uncircumcised barbarian Scythian slave free but Christ is all and in all and if we reflected upon that a little it might change how we relate to our Christian brothers and sisters love is to bind us together within the Christian community but not just the love of Christ that is to clothe our lives the peace of Christ is to rule in our hearts so he says in verse 15 let the peace of Christ rule to which indeed you were called in one body and be thankful again the idea there is of the fellowship it's not some inward feeling of peace it's the peace that

[37 : 45] Christ brings by virtue of his lordship those reconciled to God must be reconciled to one another we're not to be a war zone or there's not be infighting you know the ancient world of Paul's time was ruled by the Pax Romana peace was guaranteed at the point of a Roman sword but in the church it's the Pax Christiana that is to rule it's a peace that comes to rule over us and within us by the precious blood of Christ the shalom of Jesus is to prevail in our midst not just the peace of Christ and the love of Christ but also the word of Christ here in 16 and 17 the word of Christ is to indwell our hearts let the word of Christ dwell in you richly teaching admonishing one another in all wisdom singing psalms hymns spiritual songs with thankfulness in your hearts to God whatever you do word or deed do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to

God the father through him this new life is the way of love and it's the way of peace it's also the way of the gospel it's shaped by the word of Christ Paul's words here literally mean that the word of Christ the gospel is to make its home in our lives you know how we sometimes might say you know to people to you know to make yourself at home in our house well just make yourself at home you know take off your shoes put off your you know put up your feet relax I've run out of the place well that's how it's to be with the word of Christ so the word is not to be an occasional resident it's to be a permanent visitor it's to be at home and to govern and to shape our lives it's the word of Christ that enables us to minister one another and to be a Christ centre people and to create a spirit of thanksgiving that actually as Paul says here is to pervade and permeate the church's fellowship and life together everything we do whatever it is word deed seen unseen great small it's all to be done in the name of the

Lord Jesus we need to consider who we are in Christ we need to confront sin in our lives and we need to clothe ourselves with the garments of Christ I remember years ago I finished with this will I tell the story will I not I'll tell the story briefly story I read in a book by Peter Lewis called the glory of Christ he tells the story of being on holiday in Wales somewhere and he attended a church and there was a there wasn't a minister there so one of the elders got up to preach and at the end of the preach he told the story about a guy in his home village who played rugby and actually played rugby for Wales and how he looked up to this guy thought he was wonderful he was his hero and as he grew up and he got to play rugby himself and he got to know this guy got to know him quite well and he said you know the closer I got to him the smaller he became the closer I got to him the smaller he became and then he spoke about coming to Jesus

Christ in faith and he said you know with Jesus the nearer I get to him the bigger he appears our great need is to get closer to the Lord and to turn our eyes upon Jesus Robert Murray McShane wrote a friend with this advice learn much of the Lord Jesus for every look at yourself take ten looks at Christ he is altogether lovely such infinite majesty and yet such meekness and grace and all for sinners even the chief live much in the smiles of God bask in his beams feel his all-seeing eye settled upon you in love and repose in his almighty arms let your soul be filled with a heart ravishing sense of the sweetness and excellency of Christ turn your eyes upon Jesus let's pray

Lord help us to see who we really are in Jesus help us to be strengthened in our relationship with him by your Holy Spirit and help us because we see Jesus clearly and we love him dearly Lord help us not to be afraid to confront sin in our lives of whatever kind it may be help us to deal with it ruthlessly and to put it away help us to kill it before it damages us our Lord help us to clothe ourselves each day in the love of Christ so that in our relationships with others they will see that love Lord may the peace of Christ dwell in this congregation may the word of

[43 : 30] Christ dwell in all its people that you might receive all the glory and honour and praise through our Lord Jesus Christ Amen