

Sermon:

A word of encouragement for those who are weary with life, COVID 19, Church online, social media rubbish. At first glance we often think that Paul gives a whole lot of ethical/moral instructions of what Christians can and can't do, but at second glance, Paul gives us hope and encouragement

"So if you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³ for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life is revealed, then you also will be revealed with him in glory.

⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed (which is idolatry). ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. ⁷ These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that life. ⁸ But now you must get rid of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. ¹¹ In that renewal there is no longer Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all!

¹² As God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony." (Colossians 3:1-14)

- Colossians was written by Paul to combat false understanding of Jesus.
- The two main problems were the misunderstood doctrine of Christ, and the misunderstanding of how this doctrine affects Christian living.
- This letter contains 2 primary Christological passages (1:14-23; 2:9-15) that present Christ as absolutely preeminent/dominant and perfectly life-giving for the Christian.
- Then Paul goes onto explain that the Christian life flows naturally out of this revelation.
- The Christian life is really the life of Jesus that flows through the believer.
- So Paul declares the character and nature of Jesus, then goes on to describe what that would look like in the believer.

- Paul moves from doctrine to practice, from the truth about Jesus to its application in daily living.
- That brings us to chapter 3:

*“So if you have been raised with Christ, **seek** the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ²**Set your minds on** things that are above, not on things that are on earth, ³for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.” (Col. 3:1-3)*

- Here Paul gives a clear directive that identifies the Christian's responsibilities: "seek" (v. 1) and "set your minds/affection on" (v. 2).

1. Seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God:

- The word 'Seek' (zeteite) implies not an investigation but an effort to obtain. Not just looking for your glasses or keys or phone, but ongoing effort to acquire/get, when we leave work and seek to obtain an apprenticeship/degree.
- It's something we invest our whole self into, not just a few minutes here and there.
- Paul is directing the church to invest their whole self into 'things above', or things of God's kingdom.
- This preoccupation with 'things which are above' is not born of wistfulness, as though one can find relief from the pressures of the world only by looking to a better world. It is not an effort to detach oneself, to find escape.
- Rather, it is the attitude of Jesus during His days on earth, who lived His life against the backdrop of eternity.
- Everything Jesus did, everything He said was with eternity in mind.

Move into a new house, decorating against the backdrop of curtains.

- Everything conversation was against the backdrop of God's kingdom, every healing was against the backdrop of God's kingdom. Jesus showed us what it looks like to seek first the kingdom of God...
- What did Jesus seek after, put His heart and mind towards...justice, love, hope, rightness. Everything He did and said was set against the backdrop of this.
- These are the things we are to seek after with as much determination and passion as we would seek after furthering our education – time, money, energy, focus...forgoing other things for the sake of...

Personal example of family/ministry/study commitments – even holidays were consumed with my pursuit.

- There's a cost involved in seeking passionately after God's kingdom, Jesus shows us what it looks like, and in this letter, Paul shows us what it looks like.
- Paul directs the church to seek after the things of the eternal kingdom, and in doing so he echoed the teachings of Jesus:

"¹⁹ Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰ but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matt. 6:19-21)

- This emphasizes the whole bent of life which fuels the practical pursuits of life.
- As we seek after the things that are above such as, justice, love, hope, rightness etc. things that cannot be corroded, eaten or stolen away, everything in our life is energized and influenced by this.
- Paul is saying that we must seek after the things of God's heart like we would seek an apprenticeship or degree, and that from now on the Christian will see everything in the light of, and against the background of eternity/heaven/God's kingdom.
- We will no longer live as if this world was all that mattered; we will see this world against the background of the larger world of eternity.
- We will, for instance, set giving above getting, serving above ruling, forgiving above avenging; kindness above malice – the fruit of the Spirit above the desires of the flesh.
- The Christian will see things, not as they appear through human eyes, but as they appear to God.
- Isn't that amazing! Imagine seeing your life or circumstances not through your eyes, but through the eyes of God...
- We would see that intellectual brilliance, advanced education, or excellent physical strength are not required for a Christian to become great.
- What God requires is faithful perseverance in the basics of the Christian life, hear God's word spoken through the prophet Micah:

"He has told you what is good; and what the Lord requires of you: to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:8)

- Well done to those who have sought after this.
- Well done to those who have fought for justice, love, hope, for doing what is right by God and others, you are great in the eyes of God.
- Take a moment to evaluate the pursuits of your heart and honour those times that you turned away from worldly pursuits for the sake of seeking after God's kingdom.
- Just as I'm sure there will be aspects that passionately seek after the things of God's kingdom, and there are probably opportunities for further growth. Because unfortunately, we are often tempted to abandon the basics for what appears to be more interesting, simple, or more achievable.
- Every Christian can pursue after and obtain the things of God's kingdom such as justice, hope, love, peace, forgiveness, kindness, grace, joy...because we all have the Holy Spirit.
- The very breath of God lives in you and enables you to run the race with perseverance and don't grow weary of doing good.
- Invite the Holy Spirit to refresh, renew, restore, enliven and empower your Godly pursuits.
- Paul now, moves to the more practical expression of this teaching. He gives 3 instructions to the Colossian church regarding their ungodly behaviours:

1. Put to death the various expressions of sexual immorality:

"⁵ Put to death, therefore, whatever in you is earthly: fornication, sexual impurity, driven by sexual passion, evil desire, and greed (which is like lusting after). ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming on those who are disobedient. ⁷ These are the ways you also once followed, when you were living that (pagan) life."

2. Paul's second list deals with sins of speech:

"⁸ But now you must put aside of all such things—anger, wrath, malice, slander, and abusive language from your mouth. ⁹

- There are three generations of sin mentioned here: anger that is held onto creates wrath, and wrath if not evaluated it produces malice.
- Paul invites his readers to intentionally notice the connection, and be mindful of the progression, because these behaviours are not of His kingdom.

3. Pauls 3rd command is very strong:

"Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have stripped off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have clothed yourselves with the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator. " (Col. 3:9-10)

- This one is pretty self explanatory, don't lie! Lying is not of God's kingdom, get it out of your life!
- Paul is declaring that God in and through Christ has broken the power of the evil nature over the believer's life. Now, we are charged with the responsibility of maintaining this state of liberation, and, if/when the desires of the evil nature come before us, we are to put them to death and lay them aside and don't lie! In other words, refuse to indulge in the desires of the flesh.
- But the reality is, despite the power of having died with Christ in his death, there were still things, parts of the old life, habits of heart or mind, which can tie us to the earthly desires and hinder the outworking of a mind 'set on what is above'.
- Now the sins of the flesh that Paul mentions here, sexual immorality, harsh words, and lying may or may not keep you from seeking and pursuing the things of God's kingdom, but they do hinder many people, both the church and the unchurched.
- But rather than judge those who do indulge in the sinful behaviour, let us pray for them, encourage them in their growth and support them when they do succeed.
- Sometimes people wonder is there's any hope for change. Will my life ever get any better, will things ever be different???

Personal example of prison ministry – people told they would never amount to anything and probably end up in prison...

- Well, here is a word of hope:
- Paul reminded the Colossians of who they were ("those ... chosen by God"), because an appreciation of *who we are* affects how we behave.
- God made you as an object of His love. God has made everyone as an object of His love!
- That statement just rolls off the tongue, but let these words sink into your soul: God made you as an object of His love!
- Is this something that you can accept, really, truly accept?

- Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to believe and receive this word of truth for you!

“¹² As God’s chosen ones, holy and loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. ¹³ Bear with one another and, if anyone has a complaint against another, forgive each other; just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ Above all, clothe yourselves with love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.” (Col. 3:12-14)

- Compassion; Kindness; Humility; Gentleness; Patience; Forgiving; Love are all features that deal with our interpersonal relationships and how we respond to each other.
- I wonder, out of this list of qualities, what God is inviting you to be attentive to?
- Sometimes we say of a person, 'Music is her life—Sport is his life—He lives for his work.' Such a person finds life and all that life means in their music, or sport, or in work, as the case may be.
- For the Christian, Christ is their life.
- As we pursue the things of God’s kingdom, and the ways of Jesus dominate our thoughts and fills our life, our behaviour, attitude, and language become like His, and we become like Him.
- Don’t grow weary of doing good, for your reward in heaven will be great, and you are bringing something of God’s kingdom into the lives of others.

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