

“Set Your Hearts (Seek) on Things Above”

Colossians 3:1-4; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; Ephesians 2:6-7; Philippians 2:5-11; 3:20-21

Last week we talked about the experience of the transcendent peace of God available to Christians no matter the circumstances – even in times of real threat to life and real suffering (cf. Philippians 4:4-7). We highlighted the importance of prayer as “life lived in relationship with God.” We mentioned that the peace of God was found in the palpable presence of God – which is facilitated by our intentional and meditative “thinking on” or “consideration” of gospel truths (cf. Philippians 4:8-9). In summary;

- We noted that the transcendent and indomitable peace of God is a result of a growing intimacy with God – facilitated by prayer.
- Also the palpable presence of God – “the God of peace will be with you” – is the experience of the Christian who intentionally *thinks on* or *meditates* on gospel truths.

Paul’s exhortation to “think on” gospel truths, equates to an intentional filling of our minds with, or setting our affections on, Jesus – Colossians 3:1-4

- Paul, in Colossians 3:1 commands us “to seek” (ESV) or “set your hearts on things above” (NIV). The word translated “seek” or “set your hearts on” has a scope of meaning encompassing both effort and passion or desire – “*to devote serious effort to realize one’s desire or objective, strive for, aim (at), try to obtain, desire, wish (for)*” (BDAG, 3rd edition). The remaining verses make it easy to see that Paul is calling on us to “seek” or “set (your) our hearts” on Jesus!!

- Such an intentional and passionate pursuit of Jesus is a work of the Holy Spirit. This is the reason He was sent to indwell every true believer in Jesus. This is work of the Spirit, by attraction (cf. 2 Corinthians 3:18). The Spirit delights to unveil to us “the glory of Christ who is the image of God” as He “shines in our hearts with the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.” He does this because He takes pleasure in sharing His love the Father and the Son.

Let’s consider the key truths Paul declares in these 4 verses and the reason they are so fundamental to our life and hope in Jesus – the life that is now and yet to come.

Jesus Christ is presently seated at the right hand of the Father – Colossians 3:1-4

- Jesus is the Divine Son of God incarnate – fully God and fully man - cf. Colossians 1:15, 19; 2:9; John 1:1-2, 14; Philippians 2:5-11. **We celebrate His incarnation at Christmas** – In his hymn, “*Hark the Herald Angels Sing*,” which celebrates the birth of Jesus, Charles Wesley emphasized the Incarnation in phrases like “veiled in flesh the Godhead see, Hail the incarnate deity” “Pleased as man with men to dwell, Jesus our Emmanuel”

- Jesus *had to* become fully human, all that we are – (***He had to become all that He would redeem***) - in order to conquer the reign of sin and death brought on by the 1st Adam. He then, as the God-man, could become the 2nd Adam – cf. Romans 5:12-21; 8:1-4; Hebrews 2:14-18

- Jesus' incarnation was for the purpose of His atoning work on the cross. However, His work on the cross would have been devoid of the power to save fallen humanity from sin were it not for His bodily resurrection from the dead – cf. 1 Corinthians 15:12-28, 42-58

- Jesus' resurrection would bear no hope if He ceased to be fully man in His exaltation to glory. The incarnation continues today – as one author put it, “The Incarnation is a present reality.” **This is the necessary conclusion when considering 3:1-4 – That is the point of 3:1 & 3.**

Jesus did not leave us behind! He brought us with Him – we are *in Him!*

He continues to be all that He was on the day of His exaltation – David Mathis wrote a very brief 3 part series on the Incarnation titled “*The Permanence of Christmas*” which is published on the “Desiring God” website – he notes that what has often been lost in our contemporary teaching (but was assumed and was a central doctrine in the history of the church) is the truth of Jesus' ascension and what it means – His exaltation to glory. Citing Philippians 2:6-8 & 3:20-21 in a subpoint, “*Keeping the Form of a Servant*” he writes, “Jesus didn't shed his human skin. He still has a body – a ‘glorious body,’ a perfected human body, a body like we haven't yet experienced but one day will experience when he transforms us.” ***It is clearly taught in scripture that Jesus ascended and was exalted to the right hand of His Father bodily, fully human.***

We are seated with Him in glory – and we share in His glory – which is in the familial relationship of the Triune God – cf. Colossians 3:3-4; Hebrews 2:5-10; Romans 8:16-18; 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-14

- Jesus serves here as the 2nd Adam, the head of the “new humanity.” ***Adam***, by his rebellion/sin, led us out of the garden, ***away from the presence of God*** and into a cursed existence. ***Jesus*** became fully human and as the 2nd Adam, He entered into complete solidarity with us. In His flesh, He was made sin for us and He conquered sin, the curse and death on the cross. He then was raised as “the first born from among the dead” and exalted to the right hand of the Father (cf. Colossians 1:18). Michael Reeves wrote of Jesus;

“He never abandons humanity, even at the last minute; he never leaves the temple of his body. Having taken on our humanity he faithfully bears it back to heaven and back to his Father, like a good shepherd carrying home his lost sheep.” (“Rejoicing in Christ,” page 72, IVP)

- Jesus sits at the right hand of the majesty, on our behalf, occupying that exalted position ***as the glorified man***. He is seated at the Father's right hand, having achieved the glory in which we

share – cf. **Colossians 3:3-4; Hebrews 2:5-10**. Because that is true – we are not abandoned to life’s hardest moments – rather they work that glory in us more sweetly – that’s the message of Romans 8:16-18; 2 Corinthians 4:7-15, 16-18; also Philippians 1:20.

This next point is among the most important that I will make...

- ***This shared glory is familial and therefore relational.*** It is the glory of being brought into and presently living in the life and love of God – by the Holy Spirit - **John 14:1-4, 15-23; 17:20-26** “I want them to see my glory...”

1. My Father’s house “*bet ab*” - Sandra Richter, professor of OT at Wheaton College, wrote of Jesus’ words in John 14:1-4, “*The goal of redemption is not a marbled mansion, but reincorporation into the bet ab of our heavenly Father.*” (“The Epic of Eden,” page 39).

2. This means that in His exaltation to glory, Jesus as the glorified man, who remains the Divine Son of the Father, went to prepare a place for us in the family dwelling. Jesus’ presence, as the exalted and glorified man at the right hand of the Father, guarantees our adoption as “sons” into the family – the life and love of the Triune God. It guarantees our profound presence there with Him, as a member of the family, “*If it were not so I would have told you.*” – cf. John 14:1-4.

3. This means that Jesus did not leave us as orphans (cf. 14:15-23). This is a work of the Holy Spirit as He lives in us (cf. Romans 8:5-16 – “*The Spirit of sonship by which we cry Abba Father*”).

We understand from John 14:15-23 and Romans 8:5-17 that it is by the Spirit that there is a mutual indwelling – we are in Jesus and He is in us by the Spirit AND as He is in us and we in Him, He then is in the Father and the Father in Him – this is one of the truths of gospel that is “beyond tracing out.” It is this truth of which Paul writes in Colossians 3:3-4.

This sweet, weighty relationship is ours because the Father, Son and Spirit delight in sharing their love for one another with us. The Spirit takes pleasure in sharing the Father’s great love for His Son and the Son for the Father – so Jesus is pleading with the Father that, by the Spirit, He would make those very things happen among us (cf. John 17:20-26 – here an now).

As Jesus, the exalted and glorified man, occupies and guarantees our place in glory with the Father, the Spirit creates the ***real*** unity and presence we have with Him at the Father’s right hand! That’s what it means when Paul writes “*For you died and your life is now hidden **with Christ in God***” (cf. Colossians 3:3).

Note: In keeping with Jesus’ words in John, Paul is declaring in Ephesians 2:6-7 and Colossians 3:1-4 that, by the work of the Spirit, we are incomprehensibly united and present with Jesus, ***where He is NOW.***

His continuing humanity qualifies Him to sympathize with us and to effectually intercede for us as our great High Priest – cf. 1 Timothy 2:5-6; Hebrews 4:14-16; 6:18-20; 7:22-8:2; 10:19-25

- Jesus' "helping" intercession and His capacity for sympathy is dependent upon His ongoing incarnation - Hebrews 2:14-18; also 4:14-5:10.

At the risk of being flippant – the Divine Son of God didn't just drop in for the human experience, to learn what He did not "know" and then go and report to the Father and explain the depth of our struggle. He didn't go on a short term mission of 33 years to gain needed perspective. He *became* human, to forever be human – the God-man – "He became as we are so that we might become as He is" He then is able to "sympathize" with our weakness – to feel with us in His humanity – not simply *to be patient with us* but to feel with us (cf. Hebrews 4:14-16 and 5:1-10).

- Jesus' saving intercession is based in His continuing incarnation – His indestructible and eternal life – cf. 7:22-8:2

His kindness is poured out on us throughout the ages *in Christ* - by necessity, this present age – poured out on us and experienced by us through the Spirit – Ephesians 2:6-7; Romans 5:5; 8:5-39

- There is an ongoing ministry of love extending to us based in the presence of the "glorified man" – Christ Jesus – seated at the Father's right hand – cf. **Ephesians 2:6-7**; also Colossians 3:2-4

Note: Some might say that the phrase "*in the coming ages*" in Ephesians 2:7 refers to the age represented by the New Heavens and New Earth (cf. Revelation 21-22). My sense is that Paul is referencing a present reality – something to be experienced by the believer, in Jesus, in the context of this fallen world and in anticipation of that day.

- This is a work of the Holy Spirit given to us by the risen and exalted Jesus – cf. Acts 2:14-24; Romans 5:5; 8:5-39

For the Christian, "Home is where the Lord is" – cf. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18; John 14:1-4

- This compels us to set our minds and hearts on Home.

- This transforms our times – those we share together in fellowship and those we experience in the course of daily life – into times of conscious worship. You and I can understand that we are, right now, together before the throne of God – "*hidden with Christ in God*" – cf. Hebrews 6:18-20; 10:19-25. However, I am – we are ***never NOT*** in the presence of God in the Beloved. So too, He is never separated from us (cf. Romans 8:31-39).

