SET ON CHRIST TO DWELL RICHLY ON HIS WORD

Colossians 3:1-17

Key Verse: 3:16

Good Morning! Happy New Year! Happy Lord’s Day! I am very humbled to be chosen by God to present the word of Colossians 3 to you this morning. Not because I am in any way deserving to be here talking to you like this by any measure but because of the greatness of God and the greatness of Christ that is revealed in the book of Colossians. I sincerely pray that I may serve God’s word properly to you. Dear Heavenly Father, Lord, I stand before You with fear and trembling that I may serve Your word properly to Your people. They are here eager and hungry for You, Lord. May You send the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to see Christ and may Christ be revealed in each of our hearts through Your Word to us today.

I. Set Your Hearts and Minds on Christ

Again, “Happy New Year!” The year 2020 has passed and 2021 has come. As you may have already heard, the Time Magazine has dubbed the year 2020 as “The Worst Year Ever”. And for many people, this statement is actually true. Many people fell ill that year. For a lot of people, 2020 was actually the last year of their life. Many lost someone they loved; lost their husband, or perhaps their wife; some lost a parent; and still some lost a child. Some never regained their health, quite a few lost their jobs, and at the very least, many had their school terms, goals, and life plans grossly disrupted. So a lot of people were glad to say goodbye to the year 2020 as they set their hopes for a better 2021. To many, this meant setting their hopes on a vaccine as a viable response to regaining their lives back from this pandemic. To many living in the United States of America and perhaps even countries in other parts of the world, it’s about their hopes in a new president.

But what about you? Where have you set your hopes? On what pursuits have you set the desires of your heart? In where have you set your goals and to which direction will they take you? What does God think about them and what does He have to say concerning this matter? Let us read Colossians 3:1-2 together: “Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.”

According to God’s word, we’re to set our hearts and minds on Christ. As we let God’s word sink in for a moment---the more perhaps we realize it’s hard to not feel sucker-punched by it. Does this mean that we cannot think about other things, or have any other goals? We have so many desires---so many thoughts in our minds. So much that we want to do and so much that we want to accomplish. How do you sort it out? Our thoughts tend to go hand in hand with what our hearts desire: you think about what you love and what you love, you tend to think about a lot. Most of all, we think about what we treasure. If you treasure children, you will think about them a lot. If you love your grandchildren more, you will think about them more. If you love money you will think about money a lot: how to make it, keep it, invest it, multiply it. In the same vein, if a lot of your thoughts consist mostly about your self, how you feel, how you want to act, dress, look to others, what you want to eat….then, what you really love is your...self. But if we treasure Christ, there our hearts and thoughts will also be. So God’s command for us to set our hearts and minds on Christ is actually a very useful word to us---we need it. That being said, because it’s a command, we’re also to do this intentionally. Absent doing this, we set our hearts and minds on other things.

To set our hearts and minds on Christ in this sense is more than just about considering Jesus as more important than anything else; it is to consider Him as our life. Why should we do this? Let’s read v.3-4 together. “For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.” Here is an important point that we cannot miss: “For you died…” Unless we truly died to our life without Christ, we cannot truly live a new life with Him. In this sense, dying to that worldly life is a prerequisite to living in Christ. Without it, we cannot truly love Christ.

I realized as I was meditating on this passage, that there is more to this than just perseverance in Christ. Christian life is about life with Christ; life in Christ and the revelation of God’s mystery which is Christ in you. (1:27) God helped me to personally understand this word of His in an interaction I once had with my daughter. She had a wound that was particularly painful to her. To me, it was so small and it looked like nothing. But she was absolutely bothered by it, and absolutely terrified of the sting that she would feel at the application of the antiseptic to help it heal. She wailed even before I applied the medicine. So I told her that it will hurt, but that I also want her to think of how I love her very much and that I am doing this painful thing to help her. I asked her if she trusts me. It seemed counter-intuitive and unfitting of logic to think about how I love her when it seemed her focus should be on addressing the wound. And I could see her process this in her head. But she finally decided that she does trust me. She then listened and allowed me to apply the medicine. Her cry in that moment was barely audible compared to the cry she gave before the experience of pain. The fear is real. The pains in this life are real. But Jesus has been raised from the dead. He wants His people to know that He is living and that our life is hidden in Him (!)---that is why He wants us to set our hearts and minds on Him. In the knowledge that we have been raised with Him, to be revealed with Him when He appears in glory. In this life with Christ, He wants His people to know that ‘He’s got you---and that He’s fully sufficient and fully capable to see you through’.

So what else does life with Christ consist of?

II. Put To Death

Let’s read verse 5&6 together: “Put to death therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming.”

The key word to understanding v.5&6 is ‘nature’; which means that these things are weaved into the fabric of our goals and what we desire out of life. So while we don’t exactly wake up and say to ourselves, “Today I’m going to make it our goal to be sexually immoral”, our pursuits and what we end up doing, even if they may seem good, reveal sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, greed and idolatry. We may pursue love, but lust is there. We may think we desire only a better income, but the worship of money is there. Our earthly natures are inevitable; we almost have no control over it. In some way, this is actually how we exist.

But once we have a new life with Christ, our relationship with our earthly natures should see a change; just as our relationship with sin changes. For instance, before Christ, sin used to be my thought, my desire to satisfy, my purpose, my ways, my pattern of thinking, my practice, my life. In a word, sin is a part of my life and I just live with it. But with a new life in Christ, sin is no longer my way, it’s no longer my habit, no longer what I follow, no longer my appetite. Those living in Christ can really attest to this---they no longer have a desire for that sin they used to be enslaved to. This is what Christ did---He really did do the impossible: He set us free from the power of sin. Thus, life with Christ is no longer compatible with the life we lived before. Instead of living with sin and putting up with our earthly natures, we put it to death. Sounds impossible? Actually, this is only possible in life with Christ.

Because v.9 talks about the taking off of the old self with its practices to put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of it’s Creator. Herein lies a crucial difference between moral ethics and the Christian life. The Christian life is fully dependent on the power of Christ who is living and Christ who lives in us. This is in stark contrast with other philosophies of life that exhibit an appearance of goodness with their imposed restraints on the body--but lacking value in restraining sensual desires.

Thus we see here that life with Christ is really an active fight of putting our earthly natures to death, but that it is also a series of many victories truly won each time.

III. Let the Word of Christ Dwell In You Richly

Finally, we’re called to clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. We do this because we are God’s chosen people, holy and dearly loved (!) My dear brothers and sisters in Christ---we are dearly loved not because we believe ourselves to be, but because we actually are! This is the difference between life with Christ and life in the world. We can be compassionate, kind, humble, gentle and patient, not because we are, but because we received God’s compassion, God’s kindness, came to experience God’s humility in Christ, and are recipients of His gentleness and patience. We forgive, because the Lord forgave us. (v.13b) And we love, not because we are strong, but because we are dearly loved by God.

Ultimately, life with Christ is about letting the peace of Christ rule in our hearts and letting the words of Christ dwell in us richly. Our hearts are so easily ruled by so many things. The more we strive; the more strife we seem to have. But the rule of Christ promises peace. Finally, we’re to let the words of Christ dwell richly in us, and in all our activities and interactions with others. Jesus spoke about our hearts being something like a storage: Luke 6:45 recorded what He said about our heart: “A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.” (Luke 6:45) So make no mistake---what comes out of you is not actually random unknown things. It’s actually all the things you’ve been actively storing in your heart.

As for me, preparing this message has been particularly challenging. Each message preparation process is different each time, marked uniquely I find in exposing what spiritual challenge God wants to deal with in my life. Although I received this word in Colossians 3:16 with great gladness in my previous years, I was surprised to find how challenging it was to let God’s word speak to me this time. These words of God should be familiar to me, and a welcome friend, I thought. It wasn’t until I desired to go deep in God’s word that I found I had great difficulty in doing so. And I knew it was because I neglected to daily dwell in God’s word richly. I had so much stuff in my heart, so much thoughts in my mind that I had little to no room left for God’s word, much less be rich in it. Meditating on this passage has exposed my heart storage to be a quintessential ‘garbage can’. I pray that God may forgive my laziness in my walk with Him. But I thank Him for His kindness, mercy and grace in rescuing my life this time from being lived according to vacuous and bankrupt principles less I become spiritually vacuous and bankrupt myself. May the new year begin with us setting our hearts and minds on Christ once more, in anticipation of the treasures of Him that come from dwelling richly in His word.