

# I hope I am not seeking the wrong thing

Colossians 3:1-4

*Pastor Tim Melton*

If you could design your own life, what would success look like 10 years from now? Would it be focused on your education, a mate, your marriage, a house, your career, your children, ease of living or your bank account . . . ?

Thomas Merton, the Trappist monk, once said this: *“People may spend their whole lives climbing the ladder of success only to find, once they reach the top, that the ladder is leaning against the wrong wall.”*

Wouldn't that be a tragedy? An entire life wasted merely because they were seeking the wrong thing. Even as Christians, the evil one seeks to lure us into this same trap. One of his most common strategies is to draw Christians into a life where they regularly attend to religious activities, but at the heart level are really living for comfort, career, social status, and so many other things that are focused on self and this present world. If we are not careful, we are tempted to live a comfortable Christianity that somewhat clears our conscience while not truly living for eternity.

That is what the apostle Paul is addressing in Colossians 3:1-4:

*If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Being raised with Christ is the prerequisite for everything else that Paul is about to say. If one has been raised with Christ, if one has put their faith in Christ, then the following words apply. If a person has not been raised with Christ, then they will not be able to act on the following exhortation that Paul is presenting. Being in Christ is what makes the Christ-like life possible.

Also note that being raised with Christ is not something that they had done for themselves. They had not earned or achieved their salvation through good works. As we see in Ephesians 2:8-9, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, not a result of works, so that no one may boast.”*

Salvation had been given to them. Just as the Father raised Christ from the dead, they, too, had been raised to new life.

In verse 3, Paul writes that they have died, and in verse 1 Paul tells of how they have been raised. While this terminology somewhat helps us understand what happened at salvation, it is still somewhat vague. We see the same symbolism in baptism, when a person is lowered into the water and then raised out of the water. This is the symbolism that scripture provides, of us dying and being raised to walk in newness of life, but practically what does it mean?

As non-believers we all were citizens and lovers of this fallen world. Because of our sinful nature we had no other option. We functioned by the rules and priorities of this world. We were sinful. Separated from God. Self-centered. We lived for the present. We were slaves to sin. We trusted the world to meet our needs. We believed that our ways were best. We lived for the approval of others. We sought, first, comfort and pleasure. We were dead in sin. We even tried to save ourselves and justify our guilt. This was our old life. Then, just as Paul wrote in Galatians 6:14, at salvation ***“the world was crucified to me, and I to the world.”*** We died to the fallen world. When we put our faith in Christ our old “self” died.

Where I come from, when someone is sleeping deeply you might refer to them as being “dead to the world”. You are just saying that they are unresponsive to anything that is happening around them. That is us, now that we are in Christ. We are now dead to the fallen world. In Christ we now have the freedom and the power to be unresponsive to the temptations of the world. We now are alive and sensitive to the Spirit of Christ who now lives in us. As we grow in Christ, in this new life, we learn to recognize His voice more clearly and obey more completely. Before, in our lostness, the scriptures tell how we were slaves to sin and were controlled by our sin nature. Now we are free. We have been given a new nature. While we still can sin, it no longer is our mandated way of living.

It is like a character in a fiction movie who dies and then wakes up in a completely different world. In some ways that is what has happened to us. When we put our faith in Christ we died to all the realities of the fallen world. Then we were raised with Christ into a totally new life. We still look the same. The world still looks the same, but we are now to see it completely different. For the first time ever we are truly alive. From an eternal, spiritual perspective, everything has changed. Our identity has changed. Scripture tells that we are a new creation. We have a new nature. We have been given a new name. We are now forgiven and counted righteous. We are children of God. Those who are in Christ have already begun eternal life. There will be a day when our physical bodies cease to function, but our soul and our spirit will continue on, non-stop, into eternity.

This new world, which we have been reborn into, has different rules. We no longer have to desperately meet our own needs. We can rest, knowing that all of our needs are met in Christ. We are holy. We don’t have to sin. We are spiritually alive. We live for eternity. We are to be selfless and God-centered. Loving others has replaced loving self. Dying to self brings life. Mercy is better than judgment. Giving is better than receiving. Humility is better than pride. Forgiveness is better than revenge. In our weakness He is strong. In our need we find grace. All that we attain in this physical world will be lost and all that we invest in for eternity will be gained. We have been born again and we now have access to a new world.

***If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.***

Paul was telling the Colossians that because they now have been raised with Christ, and have been ushered into this new reality, they should no longer seek the things of the world, but instead should seek the things that are above. Their definition of success, their life goals, their reason for living should change since they are now children of God and citizens of heaven.

They should not seek salvation in the basic principles of this fallen world that believe that salvation only comes through obeying earthly laws and religious regulations. They were to turn their focus to Christ, who now sat at the right hand of God. He was the source of salvation and whom their hearts should seek above all other things.

In John 16, Jesus told the disciples that He was going to the Father and would send the Holy Spirit. In Acts 1:9, we see that Jesus ascended to heaven and was seated at the right hand of God. The Spirit's coming, in Acts 2, confirmed that Jesus was now in His place at the Father's side.

Jesus sitting at the right hand of the Father has significance. This was the position of honor that Jesus had held before His incarnation. In John 17:5, Jesus said, ***"And now, Father, glorify me in your own presence with the glory that I had with you before the world existed."***

Jesus, seated at the right hand of the Father, showed that Jesus held equal honor, dignity and authority as the Father. It was the position of the Messiah mentioned in Matthew 22:41-45. It is even a position in the heavenlies that is far above all principality and authority and power and dominion, and every name being named, not only in this world, but also in the coming age (Ephesians 1:19-21). Jesus sits at the right hand of the Father and is able also to save forever those who draw near to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them (Hebrews 7:25, Romans 8:34).

Ephesians 2 tells us how even we have been raised up and seated with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Jesus has already prepared a reserved seat for us, with Him in eternity. He has done it ***"so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus."*** This is the future that we are to keep in mind even while we are living in the present.

***<sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.***

For the church in Colossae, their hope was laid up in heaven. Their hope was definitely not in the government where Caesar was lord. Or amidst their society which sought after materialism, pleasure and pagan gods. They were the minority. The precious few. If they did not intentionally set their mind on the things above, their thoughts would be misled by the godless culture that surrounded them.

In the following verses Paul described the things "below" including sexual immorality, impurity, evil desire, covetousness, anger, rage, malice, and slander. He then described the "things above" such as ***"compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving each other."*** As they turned their attention towards the things above these would be the characteristics that would be theirs in Christ.

Their hope was in the conviction of things not yet seen, the promises that were still yet to come. Even if they had to endure pain and suffering, it would be endured against the backdrop of eternity and the things above.

Like the Colossians, we are constantly bombarded by the influence of the world and the “below” behaviors that surround us. If we do not intentionally set our minds on the things of God, we will succumb to the lies of this world. We must actively expose ourselves to the truths of God so that we may continue to walk in faith and obedience.

As we grow to believe the truths from “above” we will begin to turn away from the lies and behaviors from “below”.

***<sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***

Paul was reminding the Colossians that they have died to sin, self, and this world. Because of this their life is now hidden with Christ in God.

We first see this idea of hiding in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve sin and because of their sin and nakedness try to hide from God in the garden of Eden. We see hiding again in Revelation 6:15-16. Here we read that ***“the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful, and everyone, slave and free”*** all called out to the rocks and the hills to ***“fall on us and hide us from the face of him who is seated on the throne.”***

In these two situations the hiding was motivated by the presence of God and the fear of the judgment that was being brought upon them because of their sin. Between Genesis and Revelation we find the cross. Jesus, bearing the sins of the world on His shoulders, fully exposed to the judgment of God, on the cross. Nowhere to hide. Suffering humiliation, torture, and death for our sake. Because of this, all who turn from their sin and believe in Jesus Christ are now hidden with Christ in God. Never again will we have to fear the wrath of God. When God looks upon us He sees the righteousness of Christ. We are hidden in Christ. Fully wrapped in His grace.

As the old hymn says, ***“Rock of ages, cleft for me, let me hide myself in Thee.”***

Remember that we have died to his world and are now alive in Christ. We are hidden in Him. Our physical life is visible, but all that we are in Christ, the child of God, who has a reserved seat in heaven with Christ, is still hidden in Christ, not yet visible. It is at the return of Christ that all of this will no longer be hidden. It will become apparent whose we are.

***<sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.***

The Colossians are hidden in Christ, but still outnumbered, ridiculed and misjudged. But a day is coming when all will be made clear. Christ will return as the conquering Savior. In this way we should be literally seeking the things from above with expectation. There will be a day when Christ will come, ***“seated at the right hand of Power and coming on the clouds”*** (Matthew 26:64).

At that time every knee will bow and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Phil. 2). All will see that Christ is Lord, and it will become clear that we are His. In Romans 8:30 the Apostle Paul tells that we have already been glorified, it simply has not yet been

revealed. Jesus has given us the glory that the Father gave Him (John 17:22), but the full revelation of this will come when Christ appears.

So, we wait. Trusting in God's Word. Walking in His Spirit. Loving His people. Moving towards eternity. Setting our minds on the things above. Knowing that one day Christ will come, the Gospel will be proven true, and we will dwell in the presence of God forever.

In conclusion let us think about the words of Christ, Himself:

***"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." (Matthew 6:19-21)***

Jesus is speaking from what He knows, what He has experienced. Only He has been fully in heaven and fully on earth. So, He speaks this truth to His listeners calling them away from the superficiality of this present world and to the eternal value of heaven.

Jesus is telling them, "Don't invest everything you have and everything that you are in the here and now. This life is but a moment compared to how long eternity is going to be. He calls his listeners away from storing up superficial "treasures" on earth in this present age. Even the "treasures" that last throughout our lifetimes will ultimately be lost at death. We cannot take anything with us.

We are familiar with this concept of investing. We would not invest in a company that is bound for bankruptcy. We would not buy a house that has leaks in the roof, termites in the walls, a cracked foundation, and dangerous electrical wiring. We would not buy a car that will not start, or pay for our children to attend a school that we have heard terrible things about. Jesus is just telling us about the true reality of things. The only wise way to invest our lives is in the eternal things above.

It is not possible to seek both the things above and the things below. It is a tug of war for our souls. From the perspective of eternity it is pure foolishness to cling to the things of this world, which we will certainly lose.

Whether we realize it or not, we are all investors. We all are investing our money, our time and our lives in something. We won't be able to take any of these superficial "treasures" with us. Only the investment in eternity will last.

Maybe, early in your faith you were focused on the things above, but now you are realizing that you have drifted away from Him and have begun to pursue the ways of the world. It would be similar to a family that goes to the beach. They set out their beach chair, umbrella and towels and enter the waves to play for a while. After 30 minutes, they look towards the beach and all of their belongings are gone. They get worried until they realize that while they were not paying attention, the tide had gradually moved them several hundred meters down the shoreline. Their things were still in the same place. It was they who had drifted.

Many times, this is the story of our Christian lives if we are not intentionally seeking the things above on a daily basis. We look up one day and our lives are sinful, our emotions are jaded, our minds are misguided, our hearts are apathetic, and our priorities are pursuing the success of the world. If that

is you, then you can be counted among the Christians that we find in Revelation 2:2-4. They were followers of Christ, but Jesus had one thing against them. They had abandoned their “first love”.

If you are a follower of Christ but have drifted away, you can draw near again today. Will you confess your sin to God? Will you turn your mind away from the world below and once again set it on the things above?

Trust God to change your heart. Allow Him to loosen your hold on the things of this world and turn your heart, money, and life towards the eternal things of God. Draw near to God through reading your Bible and prayer. Confess your need to adjust the focus of your life to a trusted brother or sister in Christ and make the needed changes. Even now let God change your perspective of what matters.

In closing, let us look once again to what Paul gave us to think about:

*“If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. <sup>3</sup> For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”*

#### Discussion questions:

1. If you could design your own life, what would success look like 10 years from now?
2. What in this sermon did you find interesting?
3. Paul instructed the Colossians to “seek the things above”. How would you say that in your own words?
4. What is the benefit of Christ sitting at the right hand of the Father?
5. Why is it meaningful that we are hidden in Christ?
6. As Christians we can look forward to Christ’s coming and our being revealed as His. How do you think this was an encouragement to the Colossians, and how can it be an encouragement to us today?
7. What do you think you are to remember from this sermon?
8. What do you think God wants you to do about that? How can we help?