

Unshakeable: Living in Union with Christ, Colossians 3:1-4, 2/26/17

We have hit the halfway point in Paul's letter to the Colossians. Chapters 1&2 has been a tour de force of Gospel theology. In these chapters we have seen Paul defend Christology- that Jesus is indeed God, the creator and sustainer, the redeemer and the restorer of the all things. That salvation is found in Jesus alone and we can add nothing, and we are complete, accepted, sufficient in Him. As Christians he is our unshakeable foundation that everything is built upon.

Now Paul makes a pivot from theology to practice, from the root of Christ to the fruit of Christ, which is the pattern in Paul's letters. And chapter 3:1-4 is the hinge that connects these two sections so it is essential to truly understand and believe what Paul is going to tell us here if we are going to be able to practice the abundant Christian life, if we are going to be able to bear fruit, to live a life of freedom and power.

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. 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 appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Two times in this passage Paul tells us to be heavenly minded. He says it two ways, **v.1 Seek things above and v.2 set our minds on things above**, for Paul these are basically interchangeable terms. The point- Set your heart's affection and your mind's attention on things above. To be "heavenly-Minded." That's not really a phrase we use very often. This idea of being heavenly-minded is often sneered at. It seems like something unattractive or negative. In fact the opposite seems more attractive for many. Down to earth...feet on the grounded- sounds like a good thing. In touch with reality and how things really work. In fact there is a saying- "They are so heavenly-minded they are no earthly good." We think of them as out of touch. So esoteric with their heads in the clouds that they don't know how to live life... this is not what Paul tells us. In fact the opposite. Paul goes on from v.5 through chapter four saying once you know how to be heavenly-minded we will be able to put off greed and selfishness, we will be able to put off anxiety and fear, and worry about material things. Those who are most heavenly-minded are the most earthly good. They don't get bitter when bad things happen to them, they aren't crippled by fear even though difficult things happen to them, they are people that are able to move about with freedom and power. They become people like Paul and the apostles that were courageous and joyful and compassionate and effective at helping people. Don't we all want that? If so we better figure out how to be heavenly-minded.

So what I want us to see in this passage are three things about heavenly-mindedness.

Why it's important

What it is

How you do it

Why it's Important:

I've mentioned that we are reading through C.S. Lewis' *"The Chronicles of Narnia"* as a family right now. And like so many of the old myths, epics and legends it follows a similar storyline, The heroes start off as ordinary people, living in ordinary places. Then they are whisked away to the Land of Narnia, to a place that's extraordinary, larger than life, with more powerful and good heroes than anything they have seen in their world, and far greater, powerful evil villains than they could have imagined. And they have adventures and fight epic battles because Aslan believes in them... And Aslan inspires in them a greater courage and nobility than they thought they had. And even when the odds are stacked against them, with Aslan they know they can be victorious. Throughout the series they go back into their ordinary world. But now there is something different about them. They are larger than life now... They have been somewhere else and now they have taken some of that world with them and they move about with a new boldness, a new perspective, a new freedom and power...Why? Because as they move about in their ordinary world, they are seeing behind their ordinary world the other world. Because in their other world they faced far greater beasts and challenges with worse odds, so the challenges in this world don't faze them. Because they met the greatest and noblest of heroes, Aslan, who died for them, and his presence stays with him through the challenges and gives them love, integrity, courage, hope. Because they have been to the other world they can move through this one with freedom and power.

What's my point? Paul says, that's how Christians ought to be. Christians should live like they have died and gone to heaven and come back. Christians should be people who by faith with their minds and hearts, have had a glimpse of the Kingdom of God and live in light of it. This is why Scripture means when it refers to us as strangers and aliens in this world 1 Peter 2:11, and that our citizenship is in heaven. To the degree that our minds and hearts are fixed on and captured by the reality of heaven and not just heaven but the one who reign there, the one who did conquer, who did fight our battles, who stands victorious, will we be able to live with freedom and power over sin that entangles us, not be overwhelmed by the challenges and trials we face in this life. Not be brought down into the distractions and dizziness of this life but rise above it. Do you see? This is why it is important to be heavenly-minded.

2. What is it?

What does it mean to be heavenly-minded? To set our mind and heart on "things above?" Does it mean to constantly thinking about what kind of parties you will have in heaven, or what kind of food you will have, or epic concerts? These are fine, but not at all what Paul's talking about.

v. 1 Since you have been raised with Christ...seek the things above
v.3 For you have died, life hidden with Christ.

Paul is saying you cannot live this life of power and freedom, you can't have your mind set on heavenly things unless you really believe and know something. This isn't just some new age technique to cope with life. This isn't just think positive thoughts... although that's a good thing, this isn't just saying a mantra over and over again like "I am the force and the force is one." There are doctrinal truths that you need to know and believe. You have to really believe that you've died and have been raised with Christ. But you say, "Raised past tense? Died past tense?" What is this referring to? Only the greatest truth there ever was. The essence of being a Christian is not that I emulate Christ or that I'm listening to Christ, or love Christ, or obey Christ... all these things are true but not the essence of what it means to be a Christian. The essence of what it means to be a Christian is four words: **I am IN Christ**. What does that mean? Heart of the Gospel that we've been studying for many weeks: our union with him. **That everything that is true of Christ is legally true of you in the heavenly court of the Father.** This is what Paul means when he says:

v.3 **You died**- God treats you as if you were free from the guilt and condemnation of your sins. As if you died on the cross and paid for them in agony. Why? Because Christ did and you are IN Him.

v.1 **You were raised and are at the right hand of God.** The Father treats you as if you lived the perfect life the Son had lived, were fully pleasing to Him, accomplished everything on the cross the Son did and are worthy as he is. Why? Because you are IN Christ and your life is hidden in Christ.

v.4 Not just the past but the future, **When Christ, who is your life, appears you will appear with Him**. Jesus is returning with victory, power and glory to restore everything, to bring that other world, Heaven, to earth and the Father sees us as victorious. Why? Because we are IN Him. Do you see it? Everything that is true of Jesus is true of you.

Have you ever seen a couple that are just infatuated with each other... everything they do is just so cute, and adorable, and sweet and clever... and they think the other one just walks on water and can do no wrong. We have a saying when we see a couple like that. That they are wearing rose-colored glasses. Everything is rosier than it really is. God wears "Jesus-colored" glasses when he sees us. He sees Christ in us because we are in union with Christ.

So, what does it mean to set mind on what's above? Not the parties in heaven, or the food there. But rather it's that you think about and believe and remind yourself that your life is in Union with Jesus and what is true of him is now true of you.

Until you can have that life of true freedom and power you have to really believe that you are in Union with Christ. You can't just come into a church and say, "I need some

spiritual power but I can't believe all those stories in the Bible, that Jesus really died for me, or that I've been raised with him. Instead I believe that the spirit of Jesus just lives on in his moral teachings." My friends if that's what you believe you have nothing in your hands. There is no power and we have little to offer you of lasting and true substance, power and freedom. You've got to really believe this.

Do you really believe you are in union with Christ and all his rights and privileges are now yours?

We've talked about why it's important, what it is...

3. How do you do it?

Well this either takes 10 minutes or 10 years but let me give you some handholds to make this practical.

1. Stop

v. 2 *Set your minds on things that are above, **not** on things that are on earth.*

See Paul says we all already set our minds and hearts on things, it's just a matter of on what. To set your heart and mind means: to make it your life. To make it most important to you.

Matthew 6:21 *For where your treasure is, your heart also will be.*

Ex: Youth min- girl depressed, where was her identity... Small jewel in the treasure chest, but the bigger jewel was acceptance by a guy.

Treasure Hunt...

What things in your life, if you were to lose them, would make you feel like you didn't have a life left? What is it you rely on to bring you ultimate meaning and fulfillment?

What drives you at your core? What do you find yourself trying to control? What do you find yourself worrying/stressing about most?

Maybe it's your career. Maybe it's your popularity or social status. Maybe it's your beauty, or net worth, or marriage or kids. Good things that become ultimate things.

And we've talked about this many times because it's so critical...these things can't hold the weight of your heart's desires, they were never meant to. If these things capture your heart and mind they will disappoint us.

Jeremiah 2:13- *they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out **cisterns** for themselves, broken **cisterns** that can **hold** no water.*

Matthew 6:19-20

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

So this means we need to really think about those questions, not right now... we don't have time. But you may need to stop making something earthly your treasure.

2. Repent. Turn from it and say to God, "I love this thing that has become my treasure... I've loved it too much and you too little. So I'm am deciding that it is not my life. I may want it but I don't need it because Christ is my greatest treasure and my life." Repentance isn't just changing your mind... it means changing your actions.

Ex: When I was very involved in the investment world, I enjoyed playing the stock market, making investments, watching closely for when to sell and buy... I was around it all the time and so it made sense. When I left that career for ministry I couldn't keep up the kind of attention on the market and I had to begin to divest myself of those stocks and put the money somewhere that didn't require that much focus and attention.

Repentance may mean divesting yourself of things that have become your life. Sometimes that's obvious like if possessions have become your life, or social media, or a substance... you may need to divest yourself of those things in order to really make Christ your life. But it may be require more discernment if your spouse or your children, for example, have become your life. You don't divest yourself from them...peace- I need to get of this marriage and family and go life in a monastery because you have become my life... no don't do that. But you may need to begin to remove your control over them. Or you may need to begin seeing them differently.

3. Meditate.

Biblical meditation is not like eastern meditation, an emptying of the mind to think of nothing... but just the opposite- it means to ponder or think about something continually. Paul uses continuous tense of the verbs- seek and set our hearts and minds on the heavenly. This is not a one-time thing but continuously. Continually seeking and setting. Why? Because we forget and our hearts wonder... Like when I'm talking to my kids and I say, "Eyes up here." And then they begin to wander and I say "Eyes up hear." God's saying "Eyes up here!"

-Time in the Bible and Scripture memorization- this is how we renew our minds so we can think about the heavenly world.

-Prayer and praise

-Find things that stir your affections for Christ.... Music, getting out in nature, being around people who are on fire... and can spur us on and challenge us.

-Building these rhythms into our lives... for me

When we truly are becoming heavenly-minded people we can move with power and freedom and impact in this world.

Adoniram Judson was one such man, America's first foreign missionary. Who left in 1813 for Burma a harsh, difficult land where the gospel had not been preached. But when Adoniram Judson died in 1850, there were 7,000 baptized believers, 63

Christian congregations and 163 missionaries in Burma. He lived with a heavenly-mindedness, he lived like he had been to another heavenly world and come back... He said,

Let us, then, each, morning, resolve to send the day into eternity in such a garb as we shall wish it to wear forever.

Those who are the most heavenly-minded are the most earthly good.

Extra...

4. Integrate

Integrate the heavenly into the earthly

When Jesus taught his disciples how to pray he said, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." In essence what he was asking was that the ways of the heavenly kingdom be lived out on earth. And yet probably the biggest stumbling block to living the Christian life is that we divide the heavenly and earthly, the spiritual and the physical, the sacred and the secular in our minds and hearts. We come to church, or read our Bibles, or say our prayers...and we think of these things as the spiritual, heavenly, sacred things... and then we go about our day...to work, pursue relationships, making decisions about money, entertainment... as if they are earthly, secular, as if the ways and will of heaven doesn't apply.

But being heavenly minded, fixing our hearts and minds on things above means we integrate these gospel truths into our everyday lives and it changes everything.

Examples:

Your perspective on your possessions and money.

-If your true treasure is in heaven, then your heart won't orbit around money, stuff, time... you will be more generous to those around you. Your heart will be opened to the needs around you. The great cause of Christ in our neighborhoods and city.

What you do when you encounter disappointment.

-You didn't get the raise or the position you wanted. Instead of despair, control, anger, self-loathing... my life is not defined by my career ambitions but Christ is my life.

-A girl you really liked and you saw a future with says, I don't think we should see each other anymore. Instead of despair, control, anger, self-loathing, isolation- when we are Heavenly-minded we can say we are disappointed but that our life is not defined by that relationship, that Christ is greater, you are fully accepted by the only one whose opinion ultimately matters.

What you do when you encounter fear.

-You have a health issue, a diagnosis, or someone you love does. Instead of bargaining with God, instead of bitterness or despair. If you are heavenly-minded if this is at your core that everything else orbits, you might be afraid, or discouraged, or mourn... but not to despair but to hope. Because Christ is your life, you are already seated with Him in heaven spiritually and you will one day physically.

How you treat your spouse.

If Christ is your life, you won't try to use your spouse as a commodity, a means to meet all your deepest needs and desires. When they disappoint you, when they aren't as attentive, they aren't the leader you were hoping for...you won't despair, you won't lash out or try to control them. Because you can say- I love you, but you aren't my life. And it will free you up to really love them like Christ.