

Sermon 4, Easter Sunday, March 31: What the Resurrection Kills, Colossians 3:1-11

Proposition: Being resurrected with Christ should fix your thoughts in Heaven and train you to kill sin.

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Introduction

Dearly beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ, we gather this morning to celebrate the resurrection of the Son of God from the dead. Jesus is alive, and that is why we are here instead of at the coffee shop, the movie theater, or the gun range. We have been talking and singing about the resurrection for the whole service, and now is the time to apply it to ourselves. Paul does exactly that in our passage this morning. He says that if you have been raised with Christ, you should fix your thoughts on heaven and kill sin. Life drives out the opposite of life — the death that sin brings. The resurrection is anti-sin. So if you are walking in lust, greed, lies, abuse, and slander, you can have a pretty solid notion that you have not actually been raised with Christ. But if you have, then you need to fix your thoughts in heaven and act to kill sin.

I. You Have Been Resurrected with Christ, v. 1a

My first point is phrased as a direct statement: you have been raised from the dead with Jesus. But in his greater wisdom, Paul phrases this point as a conditional. Have you been raised with Christ? He puts an “if” in front of this statement to make you ponder, to consider, to ask the question: Have I been raised with Christ?

There is no “if” about whether Jesus Christ is alive. The twelve apostles saw the empty tomb. They went to their deaths insisting that the tomb was really empty, that Jesus was really alive, that He could never die again because of the power of God’s own life that surged through His body and brought Him back from the dead. Jesus lives! That is the Easter message, and that is what has gathered the church, built Western civilization, inspired the cathedrals and the oratorios, and what gives each one of us hope on a daily basis. But though we know for sure that Jesus is alive, Paul encourages you to examine yourself for signs of life. Are you really alive? If you have been raised with Christ, then the rest of this passage will describe you. And if you have not been raised with Christ, then the rest of this passage will sound a bit foreign. So as you celebrate the resurrection of the Son of God, remember that your resurrection is not automatic. Not everyone has been raised with Christ. Those who have need to live that resurrection life by doing something.

II. Heaven Is Where Your Thoughts Live Now, vv. 1b-3

They need to seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at God’s right hand. To seek something to means to look for it. We all understand that. But to “look for the things above” does not mean to wander around this earth saying “Where is Heaven? I can’t find the right hand of God.” You know where Heaven is, and you know the way there. Remember, Jesus had this conversation with His disciples, and He had to remind them that He is the way. He went to Heaven, and He lives in Heaven now. To seek heavenly things means to live toward them, to direct your life and your desires toward the things that are in heaven, specifically as contrasted with things that are on earth. We all know people are living for things on earth. Just ten more years or five more years and they plan to move to Florida and begin enjoying life! Just a few more months, and they will go on that cruise they’ve been anticipating. On and on it goes, from the purchase of something small (a toaster oven, a new handgun) to the purchase of a new car or home, we are made from earth and we are wired to love the things of earth and live toward them. By default, we seek the things that are on the earth. We think about home remodels and upgrades. We think about our work, our family, our neighborhood or our nation, our schedule for today, for this week, for this month. We look forward to the next wedding or funeral, the next mortgage payment or to paying off the mortgage. But the one who has been raised with Christ has the privilege and duty of thinking about permanent things, better things, heavenly things. You can ask anyone: Earth has some major problems and liabilities. Life here ain’t perfect. So why would we rather think about this old problem-ridden world when we could be thinking about perfect bliss in Heaven with Jesus?

The resurrection demands that you and I turn our thoughts off our next remodel project and onto our eternal future in Heaven with God and His Son. We are not seeking Florida as the carrot at the end of a well-lived life. We are seeking something way better than Florida, way better than Hawaii, way better than the Garden of Eden. Why? Because we died.

This is a happy day where we celebrate victory over death. But it is imperative to remember that victory over death only comes through death. That’s why we had Good Friday two days ago. Before He could rise from the dead, Jesus had to die. Before you can rise from the

dead with Him, you have to die too. What sort of death is Paul talking about here? Well, he tells us exactly what he means in v. 5. You had to die in terms of your body parts' slavery to sin. Sin was your master before you were saved; you had to die to sin. And yes, while you may call it a metaphor, to actually stop sinning is (most of the time) going to feel a lot like death. As a non-Christian, you had certain sins you couldn't imagine living without. You had to die to those sins in order to be raised with Christ. And having been raised with him, you need to think of yourself as dead to sin and its commands, habits, and desires.

That death is hidden, and so is your life with Christ. Paul is referring to Pss 27 and 30:

One thing I have asked from the LORD, that I shall seek: That I may dwell in the house of the LORD all the days of my life, To behold the beauty of the LORD, And to meditate in His temple. For in the day of trouble He will conceal me in His tabernacle; In the secret place of His tent He will hide me; He will lift me up on a rock. (Psa 27:4-5 NAS)

Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind! In the cover of your presence you hide them from the plots of men; you store them in your shelter from the strife of tongues. (Psa 31:19-20 ESV)

To outward appearances, you look just like you before you were ever raised with Christ. But as a Christian, you have a new life. You are hidden in the heavenly temple like the boy king Josiah, safe from the strife of tongues on the day of trouble.

Do you believe that? Your life is hidden. Even you can't see it. Your life still looks like one long round of getting up, going to work, going home, going to bed, and doing the same thing tomorrow. But that is not the totality of your life. Your members died to sin. They were enslaved to sin for life, but now they've died and they don't need to obey sin. You have been smuggled across the frontier in a coffin, and now your real life is hidden in Heaven, God's true tabernacle. You dwell there, you see His beauty, and you are protected from human conspiracies to steal elections and to corrupt the church with Marxism and on and on it goes. How abundant is that resurrection goodness that you have in Jesus Christ!

III. Glory With Christ Is Your Future, v. 4

Your life is hidden, but that hiding is temporary. As the psalms tell us, that hiding will come to end when the day of trouble and the strife of tongues cease. Every mouth will be stopped when Jesus returns, and your hidden life will be made manifest in glory. Jesus is our life; He personally is in the heavenly tabernacle, that is, in the throne room of God, sitting at the Father's right hand and leading the heavenly worship. Can you see that? No. Can the world see it? Definitely not. But is it happening? Yes, it is. To say that Jesus is our life is to say that He is the one who gave us life and He is the one we live for. There is no point in living if Jesus is not alive. He's our life, and He will show Himself to us and to the world at His glorious return. In fact, at His return we

will be transformed to be glorious like Him. We will look at one another in shock as our true Christian life is revealed for the first time to the naked eye.

If you could begin to believe this, how would it change your life?

If you were certain that Jesus is your life, that your real life is not subject to the foul weather and foul culture of earth, but is instead tucked safely away in heaven, what would that change? Well, Paul tells us right here. If you act on the truth that your life is hidden in heaven with Christ in God, then you will consider yourself as dead to sin. You will kill sins of lust and greed, sins of lying and slander, sins of identifying with the old Adam instead of with the new Adam who is Christ.

This is real. The one who believes in the resurrected Son of God immediately has his life transferred to a safe place in heaven where Christ is, and just as immediately sets to work on defeating and destroying sin in his life.

IV. Christ's Resurrection Teaches You to Kill, vv. 5-11

James Bond famously has a license to kill. In Christ, so do you. In fact, you have a duty to kill. What you're killing is not enemies of the state, but enemies of your soul. Paul names ten of these enemies in two lists in these verses, and traces the root of all ten sins to the larger question of identity. With whom are you in solidarity, Adam or Christ? As we'll see, he deploys a clothing metaphor, talking about putting off the old Adam and putting on the new man, who is Christ — just as Adam himself had to take off his fig leaves and be clothed in the skin of a bloody sacrifice before he could stand in the presence of God. You died to sin; now you need to consider your body parts as completely dead to the allurements and temptations of all of these sins.

A. Lust and Greed, v. 5-7

The first set of sins that you have a license and duty to kill is listed in v. 5. The first four of these clearly relate to sexual sins. Now, I don't need to tell you that our culture has a major problem with sexual sins. The way we talk, the way we entertain ourselves, the way we dress, the way we have children out of wedlock or, if we do have children while married, the way we divorce long before they have a chance to grow up — all of that is symptomatic of a deeply messed up understanding and practice of human sexuality. I need not even mention the existence of things like PornHub and the LGBTQ+ movement; they are some of the more-developed fruits of the process that began centuries ago with what we call the industrial revolution — a revolution that brought about a consumer mindset that in turn gave birth to the sexual revolution. Paul, of course, names these sexual sins that are violations of the seventh commandment, then winds up the list by naming covetousness as the problem here. That sin, a violation of the tenth commandment, appears at first glance to be the real root of what's going on. Remember that one of the things thou shalt not covet is thy neighbor's wife. She is his, not yours; covetousness means illicit desire, desire that is out of order either because of its intensity or because of its object or both. There is no correct amount of desire for your neighbor's wife. There is no correct amount of desire for immorality, impurity, passion — they're all evil desires. By contrast, the consumer economy teaches, sometimes in so many words, that "greed is good" and that consumption is the purpose of your life on earth, that your neighbor's wife is one option in an

endless sexual supermarket. This consumer economy is one huge giant enterprise entirely devoted to arousing covetousness and profiting from it. That is what advertising is all about, and we talked just a few weeks ago about the size of the advertising-industrial complex that targets us and seeks to titillate our covetous hearts. Well, as I said, we might stop at this fifth list item and say “Yep, covetousness, the tenth commandment. That’s what’s driving all of this sexual perversion.” But Paul takes it deeper still, circling back to the first commandment against having other gods. He tells us that covetousness — the tenth commandment — is a violation which amounts to idolatry — the first commandment. The sexual supermarket, and the literal supermarket (“Earth’s biggest selection!”), are giant machines for getting you to sin.

Now, yes, that is only one side of the story. You have to buy things, you have to trade to live, we need food and clothing and so on. I get that, and Paul does too. There is a place for legitimate desire. But when any of these things become gods — and remember, a god is anything you are willing to sin to get — then you are using them for evil. There is nothing wrong with corn flakes. But if you worship them, they have become an occasion for evil. There’s nothing wrong with your neighbor’s wife. But if you worship her, or lust after her, then you are making her the occasion of your evil. That is idolatry. And that, brothers and sisters, is the root sin of the five present here. When you stop thinking of the market as a convenience and start to think of it as being a necessity, or even the foundation-stone of reality, you have become an idolater. The resurrection of Christ is here to tell you that you must live in light of your death to idolatry. The market cannot satisfy you; love, joy, and peace are not for sale there. Christ is your God, and greed is not. Lust is not.

1. Killing Them, v. 5

Covetousness has to die because you have been raised with Christ. Idolatry has to die for the same reason. All five of the sins listed here have to die. You are dead to them because of the resurrection of Christ. Because He is alive, and you are united to Him, you have died to sin.

2. Reconceptualizing Them, vv. 6-7

That means you need to think differently about these five sins.

a) Targets of God’s Wrath

Stop thinking of covetousness as simply your normal cycle: I see a product, I desire it, I give everything to get it, and then I get bored with it and the cycle starts over again. Not at all. Think rather of covetousness and immorality as targets of God’s wrath. These are not things that are part of the normal consumer lifestyle; these are things that make God angry! Reconceptualizing your old sinful habits like this is a key part of what you are called to do in light of the resurrection. Jesus is alive, and you need to think of His anger at these sins.

b) Your Erstwhile Habits

The other way you need to reconceptualize these things is to think of them as past, not present. You think of them the way an ex-smoker thinks of a cigarette. “I used to do that, but I quit because it was killing me. I have no desire to go back to it. I thought I enjoyed it at the time, but I was ignoring a host of other problems that were a direct result of the cigarettes. I couldn’t breathe, I couldn’t walk quickly, I couldn’t enjoy hiking, I had to stand out in the cold for smoke

breaks, I had a cough, everything I owned stank,” on and on and on. When you think about stealing that glance at your neighbor’s wife, that’s something you used to do — not something you are going to do today. Jesus is alive, and you died to that habit. Sexual immorality — which very much includes the immorality of thinking that men and women are interchangeable and that a woman is a defective man, and the immorality of thinking that more power over against men is the best solution to women’s problems, and all of the other ungodly ideologies crafted by the wickedness of those who lie in wait to deceive — sexual immorality is something you used to do that caused a host of problems. It’s not something you and I do any more. Paul realizes that we’re not totally there yet, but he encourages us to make every effort to get there because Jesus is alive and in Him, we’ve died to sin.

B. Lies, Abuse, Slander, vv. 8-9a

The other sins we need to put away are sins against peace and unity and love. Paul gives a second list of five sins to which we need to reckon ourselves dead. These are sins against community, sins of getting mad, flying off the handle, holding grudges and speaking evil of one another. Notice how the apostle condemns abusive and filthy language from your mouth, whether that’s to one another or about one another. If you are angry at a member of this church, it’s a sin to go and angrily give him a piece of your mind. It’s also a sin to go and tell your parents, or your friends, or your kids about him and ask them to take up your grudge. If you do that, you are not only walking in malice and slander, you’re asking your fellow Christians to join you in these sins. I need hardly tell you that God hates such a thing, and it is because of this kind of sin that the wrath of God is coming on the children of disobedience. That wrath is coming on professing Christians too if they insist on walking in this kind of wickedness.

Don’t tell lies! How much of the slander, abuse, malice, etc. that the apostle condemns within the church is based on misrepresentations, misunderstandings, and outright fabrications? The lying way of life shows your identification with the old Adam, not the New.

C. The Old Man, vv. 9b-11

And that, of course, is immediately where the apostle takes it. He says that this Easter, you need to be sure that you abandon your identity in the old man and put on the new man.

Let me just take a minute to rant about how much I hate and abhor the translation “self” in this context. Okay, so it is not 100% false. But I’d say it’s at least 80% false. The old man and new are Adam and Christ, conceived as individuals with a corporate body that forms their seed — their descendants, those united to them in a single identity. Does the word “self” have that meaning? No. It doesn’t. My “self” refers entirely to me, and the translation “old and new self” seems to imply something about the change that’s within me. Now, don’t get me wrong. In the Christian life, there is a change in you. But that change is also external, and the new man is not just a change within you. To put on the new man means to be identified with Jesus Christ.

1. Your Identity in Adam, v. 9b

In Adam, you’re a liar. The old man is part of Adam’s fallen race and acts and thinks as such.

2. Converting Your Identity to Christ, vv. 10-11

If you're a Christian today (going back to v. 1) then you need to build your identity on Christ rather than on Adam.

a) Knowledgeable Like the Creator

You are part of the one body of Christ, a body (community) which is renewed in knowledge. Remember how we saw a few weeks ago in Eph 4 that God has given us knowledge and community so that we can grow up to maturity? Well, Col 3 says the same thing here. You were called in one body to grow in knowledge, true knowledge rather than the knowledge of how everyone has wronged you that you thought you knew in Adam.

b) Identified with Christ, not Ethno-Cultural-Class Distinctions

When you grow in that knowledge, you are identified with Christ. You're clothed with the new man, the new human race that is the children of God. The freedom of our glory is just ahead; when Christ, who is our life, appears, then it will become evident, but it's already true: In Him, it doesn't matter what your race, culture, class, or ethnicity is. If you're raised with Christ, then in His heavenly tabernacle where your life is hidden, those things don't apply. The new man is made up of people from every tongue, tribe, language and nation, and in this world, those things are important. But in the new humanity that will be unveiled in heaven, the most important factor, the thing we all will have in common, is that Christ is everything.

V. The Risen Christ Is Everything and Everywhere to You, v. 11c

That's what it means to say that He is all. We aren't denying that there are things besides Jesus in this world — things He created. What we mean is that He is the most important one, the one who makes everything else worthwhile. That is who Jesus is, and He is in all. You see Him everywhere. His work is everywhere. And He is in every member of the new man, the new humanity. Just as the old Adam was in you by birth, so now Jesus is in you by His Spirit. Believe in Him. He is alive, and if you have been raised with Him, set your mind where He is, for that is where your true life is too. Amen.