

Colossians 3:1-7 “So Heavenly Minded that You Are No Earthly Good” August 21, 2022
Isaiah 66
Psalm 11

Isaiah sees the day when the new heavens and the new earth will be established.
The day when God makes all things right.

Isaiah 66 opens with a reminder that heaven is God’s throne – and the earth is his footstool.
God does not need us!
And yet he regards the humble and contrite in spirit –
the one who trembles at his word!

Do you tremble at God’s word?
I understand your difficulty.
I am but a messenger – and I do not appear or sound very impressive.

Why would you tremble at anything that I say?!

But what I declare to you is the Word of the LORD!
Do not tremble at me.
But *do* tremble at the Word of God!

And Isaiah speaks of a time when Zion will bring forth a male child – a son –
and then, suddenly, a nation will be brought forth in one moment!

The male child is Jesus.
The land born in a day happened at Pentecost,
when the Spirit of Adoption was poured out –
and a nation was brought forth in one moment!

And now the new creation has begun in Jesus.
In Christ, the new creation has come.

For now it is by faith – not by sight.
We do not now see all things under his feet –
but we see Jesus, crowned with glory and honor
because of the suffering of death,
so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone. (Heb 2:9)

This sort of “heavenly-mindedness” is not unique to Isaiah.
Solomon had said at the dedication of the temple,
“heaven of heavens cannot contain you –
how much less this house that I have built.”
Solomon understood that the earthly temple pointed us to the heavenly temple.

In Psalm 11 we sing about that!

“The LORD is in his holy temple;
the LORD’s throne is in heaven.”

So let us take refuge in the LORD who’s throne is in heaven!

Sing Psalm 11A

Read Colossians 3:1-17

The three circles...

If then you were raised with Christ,
seek those things which are above...
set your mind on things above, not on earthly things.
If we have received new life in Christ,
then our priorities will be different.

Paul has set forth in chapter 1, who Christ is:

He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation,
By him were all things made,
and all things are sustained by him.
And he is the head of the body, the church,
and just as he is the firstborn over all creation,
so also he is the firstborn from the dead,
He is God.
He is man.
In one person.

So that he might be preeminent in everything.
Jesus is Lord!

In chapters 1-2, Paul also sets for what Christ has done:

He has reconciled you to the Father through his death,
so that you might be presented pure and blameless in him.
He has circumcised you through baptism,
snipping off the old man,
and granting you new life and forgiveness of sins.
He has utterly defeated all of the enemies which held you captive
--making a mockery of them on the cross.
Sin, death, and the devil are defeated foes.

So we have seen who Christ is, and what he has done:
now we are beginning to learn who we are in Christ,

and how that affects our lives.
Since you have died with Christ,
therefore Paul insists that you also have died to sin.

Since this is true, Paul declares:
you are no longer to live the way you once did.

Your whole perspective on life should change,
because you are no longer the old sinner that you once were.

The Christian life is not based on our experience or our feelings,
the Christian life is based upon what Christ has accomplished.

The imperatives of the Christian life
--the commands to seek those things which are above --
are rooted in the new reality of who we are in Christ.

Since you have been united to Christ,
live like it!

Or to put it simply:
Be who you are in Christ!

(read 1-4)

Union with Christ is at the heart of Paul's gospel.
You can find it in every letter he writes.

But what does it mean to be united with Christ?
What does it mean that his life has become ours? (v4)

To understand this, let us look at two things:

- 1) what it means to be heavenly minded?
To seek those things which are above?
- 2) what it means to die and be raised with Christ,

1. Seeking the Things That Are Above: What Does It Mean to Be “Heavenly Minded” (v1-2)

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.

I want you to think carefully about what Paul says here in verse 1.

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

What does this mean?!

We confess that Jesus was raised from the dead.
He ascended to the right hand of the Father.
There is now a man sitting at the right hand of God!

And Paul says that you have been raised *with Christ*.
You have been joined to the life of Christ –
you were buried with him in baptism (2:12),
and made alive together with him (2:13).

And so Paul says *if then* you have been raised with Christ,
seek the things where Jesus is!
Set your minds on things that are above.

John Chrysostom once said that Paul
“is always bent on showing that they have the very same things that Christ has.
Through all his epistles the tenor is this,
to show that in all things they are partakers with him.” (p46)

What does Paul mean by “things above”?

a. What Are “Earthly Things”? (see v5ff)

Well, in verse two Paul contrasts setting your mind on things above
with setting your mind on things on the earth.

What does Paul mean by “earthly”?

Look at verse 5.

“Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:”

So what Paul means by “earthly” is simply what he says next:
“sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness,
which is idolatry.
On account of these the wrath of God is coming.
In these you too once walked, when you were living in them.”

For Paul, in this context, “earthly” refers to that which is hostile to God.
He’s not talking about the earth as it was created by God.
He’s talking about the earth as it is in rebellion against God.

So why doesn’t he just say “sinful” things?!

Because Paul is not using a “bad/good” comparison here.
He’s using an “up/down” comparison.

The right hand of God (verse 1) is contrasted with the earth (verse 2).
Here’s the point:

If Paul said, “set your mind on good things – not bad things” –
he would be saying “just try to be a better person!”

But Paul is not writing about “the power of positive thinking!”
Paul is preaching the *gospel of Jesus Christ!*

Paul says set your minds on *things above* – where Christ is! – seated at the right hand of God!
Seek the heavenly things –
it is very much like what Jesus says in Matthew 6:33 –
“Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness.”

The only difference is that when Jesus said it,
Jesus had not yet ascended to the right hand of God!
But now that Jesus *has* ascended to the right hand of the Father –
Paul says seek the things above – seek the things where Christ is!

The Christian must not be earthly-minded.
We must not allow ourselves to be focused on the things of this age,
but rather we must be centered on the things of Christ.

Some people have taken this the wrong way.
Some people think that this means
that we should completely ignore the affairs of daily life.
Such people become "so heavenly minded that they are no earthly good."

But they have misunderstood what it means to seek those things which are above.
Paul is going to spend the rest of the chapter talking about
how to relate to one another in the church, at home, and at work,
so obviously he is not telling us to ignore everyday life.

But he *is* telling us to be so heavenly-minded that we are no earthly good!
Because “earthly” – in Paul’s contrast here – means “opposed to God.”

Right now, I’m trying to help bridge a gap
between one group that is concerned about lead poisoning in SB,
and another group that is devoted to historic preservation of old buildings.

In one sense, these are very “mundane” things –
but I am seeking to bridge that gap in a heavenly-minded way.

Seeking the things above completely transforms everything you do!
Because everything you do – in word or deed –
“do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus,
giving thanks to God the Father through him.” (v17)

But how do you do this?

b. How Do You “Set Your Mind” on Things Above?

It means that in the midst of your daily routine,
your heart and mind are constantly focused on Christ.

It means that you find your identity and purpose in Christ,
and not in the rat-race of life.

It means that when your kids are driving you nuts,
you find rest in Christ;
when your husband is blowing a fuse,
you understand that God's grace is sufficient for you;
when your co-workers are sniping at you behind your back,
your heart finds contentment in Christ's promises.

But what are these "things above"?

What are you to set your heart and mind on?

Paul says that these things are where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.

Well, where is the right hand of God?

Heaven.

Okay, what is heaven?

God says in Is. 66:1

"Heaven is my throne,
and earth is my footstool."

So heaven is where God resides,
and earth is the stool for his feet.

Or as the Psalmist says in Psalm 11

"The Lord is in his holy temple,
The Lord's throne is in heaven"

Solomon, in I Kgs. 8:27, recognized this when he built the temple:

"But will God indeed dwell on the earth?

Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain you.

How much less this temple which I have built!"

When we are told to set our minds on things above,
we are being told to orient ourselves to the way things really are.

Heaven is the center of the universe--because that is where God dwells.

If our lives are to give glory to God,
then our lives must be centered on heaven as well.

Heaven is not some sweet, happy place where people sit around and sing all day long.

Heaven is the most important place in your life.

Why?

Because Heaven is where the most important decisions in the universe are made:
Heaven is where God's judgment is proclaimed
Heaven is where the immortal, invisible, only wise God determines the path of history.

But that's not even the most important reason why you should set your minds on things above!

More important still is because

Heaven is where our Lord Jesus Christ is.

Rev 4-5 retells the story of the ascension of Jesus to the right hand of the Father.

All through the OT, the prophets saw visions of God *coming down to earth*.

But in Rev. 4 John is told "come up here"!

John is allowed to enter the heavenlies

to see the heavenly throne for himself!

Why can John enter the heavenlies?

Because Jesus is there.

One who bears our flesh has already entered the heavenlies!

The second Adam has triumphed over sin and death –

and by his blood he has ransomed people for God

from every tribe and language and people and nation. (Rev 5:9)

This is the reason why Paul tells you to set your heart and mind on things above,
because it is in heaven that your hope resides.

It is in heaven that your Savior has sat down at the right hand of the Father,
and you have been made complete in HIM.

Therefore, your identity,

your purpose in life,

your whole future,

is found in heaven.

Setting your mind on things above

means that you renounce earthly things –

you renounce the idolatries of your heart,

forsaking the pleasures of sin

for the glories of knowing Christ and him crucified

--because you too have died.

2. Christ – Who Is Your Life (v3-4)

³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your^[a] life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

a. You Have Died – and Been Raised – with Christ

If you are in Christ – then you have died.

You have been crucified with Christ, (Gal 2:20)

and you no longer live;
but the life that you now live in the flesh,
you live by faith in the Son of God who loved you and gave himself for you.

You have died.

This is not just a figure of speech.
This is not something future.
This has already happened.

You are dead.

Just as truly as Christ died on the cross,
so also those who are united to him have died to sin.
Remember the three circles?
In your inner man – your core of who you are – you are dead to sin,
but alive to God in Christ Jesus.

Paul says in verse 6 that the wrath of God because of the way you once walked!

But you are NO LONGER who you once were!
You have put on Christ – you have put on the new self (v10)!

Your basic identity--your heart--your life--who you are
has changed.

The old self died with Christ,

And your life is now hidden with Christ in God.

This means that your new identity, your new life,
is safe.

Your inner self – your new life – is hidden with Christ in God.

And when Christ appears,

you also will appear with him in glory.

b. Present and Future – Christ in You, the Hope of Glory

And it is for this reason that Paul commands us to

[v5]

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you:^[b] sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming.^[c]
⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self^[d] with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave,^[e] free; but Christ is all, and in all.

So, in one sense, according to Paul,

you are **supposed** to be so heavenly minded that you're no earthly good!

Because Paul says that the things of earth are sinful things--"fornication, uncleanness, etc!"

You are to be so wrapped up in the new reality which Christ has given us,
that as you go through your daily life,
everything you do and say is to be overflowing from that new life.

You are to PUT TO DEATH your members which are on the earth.

In other words,

you are to destroy whatever is left over from your old way of life.

There is no place in the Christian life for idolatry of any sort.

Since you have died to sin with Christ,

Therefore, put to death whatever remains of those sinful patterns and idolatries.

Paul warns in verse 6 that the wrath of God is coming,

precisely because of these things--

precisely because their hearts and minds are fixed upon earthly, sinful things.

But then notice what he says in verse 7:

"IN WHICH YOU **USED** TO WALK--in the life you ONCE lived"

BUT YOU DON'T LIVE THAT LIFE ANYMORE.

YOU DIED, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God,

And when Christ, who is your life appears, you also will appear with him in glory.

Your heart and mind are to be so focused on the things of Christ,

that you have nothing left to focus on sin.

The new life that you have in Christ

is to utterly destroy the remnants of the old life which has died with him.

Beloved,

THIS is what Christ has done for you.

Nothing less.

He has forgiven all your sins.

He has washed you clean.

And now he has called you into newness of life--

placing his own life within you by his Holy Spirit.

Since this is who you are in Christ,

Act like it!

God will give you the strength to walk in his ways.

Don't let Satan fool you into thinking that you have to remain a slave to sin.

Christ says that you no longer belong to this world.

You belong to HIM.

So when those evil desires well up in your heart,

put them to death.

Set your heart and mind on things above--

set your heart and mind upon Jesus Christ,

and what he has accomplished on your behalf.

Then do what Christ has given for you to do.

But, you ask,
I fail so often!
I am too earthly minded!
I am all wrapped up in my earthly pursuits,
and I don't know how to get on track!

Conclusion: Worship as a Call to Heavenly-Mindedness

Christ has given us many ways to get on track.

The most basic way is worship.

As you gather together in worship,
you are to remember who you truly are.

In the early church and in the reformation the church maintained daily worship.

Not everyone could attend every day,

But they understood that the corporate worship of the people of God
is the basic means of reminding the people of God who they really are.

We only worship once a week,

therefore we must work that much harder at remembering who we really are.

But what we do every Sunday is supposed to overflow in everyday life!

We confess our sins every Sunday.

Do you confess your sins to God every day?

Do you?

Do you confess your sins to one another?

Do you repent when you have sinned against others?

And do you forgive every day?

If you do not forgive – then you are engaging in the very anger
and bitterness that Paul says to put away!

We hear God's word every Sunday.

Do you hear God's word every day?

You can do this by reading your Bible –

or, if you're not a reader – listen to it on audio book.

But don't just read it passively –

rather, let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly!

We pray for one another every Sunday.

Do you pray with and for each other every day?

Do you sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs to one another?

(if you look down at v16 – it doesn't say to sing only in church!
we should be singing more in our daily lives!)

And we partake of the Lord's Supper every Sunday.

What does that mean for every day?

In the Lord's Supper we partake of the body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In this Supper the Holy Spirit offers us a true communion in his glorious life.

So in this Supper, we are gathered--not merely in on planet earth,
but we are gathered with all of God's people at the throne of heaven.
Christ himself is in our midst,
and by his word and sacraments he now offers you himself—
his own body and blood—
as the food of eternal life.

Every time you break bread – remember this!
Why do Christians pray before every meal?
There is no “thus saith the Lord” that requires it!

Why do we do it?
Because *every meal* reminds us that Jesus is the bread of life!

Over the last few months, I’ve been hearing people comment on how they feel disconnected –
like they don’t really have many close friends.

Remember, we just endured a global pandemic – that cut us off from each other!
At the same time, as a church,
over the last three years we have added *twenty* new families.

That means that there are *a lot of you*
who probably feel like you haven’t really connected well yet!
The combination of lots of new people and lots of disruption in relationship
means that this is a really good time to try to connect.

But don’t focus on finding someone who shares your earthly interests.
Look for someone who shares your heavenly interests!

And if your response is – but I don’t know to do that! –
then start now!

Pray.

Right now.
Pray that God will help you to seek the things that are above – where Christ is!
Pray that the Holy Spirit will direct you to someone else who wants to do the same!
And then, when you are talking after church today,
tell people – “I’m looking for someone who wants to seek Christ better.
Would you like to do that?”

Oh, sure, you’ll feel awkward!
But as you seek the things that are above –
you will find yourself connecting with others who are seeking the same things!