

## Heaven for Your Thoughts

Colossians 3:1-4 - NCBC, Sept 20, 2015

Main Point: **Spiritual life comes through a renewed mind with Christ.**

- Not by legalism and law, but by treasure and truth (v. 1-2)
- Not for here and now, but for then and there (v. 3-4)

Application: **You are how you think... so let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.**

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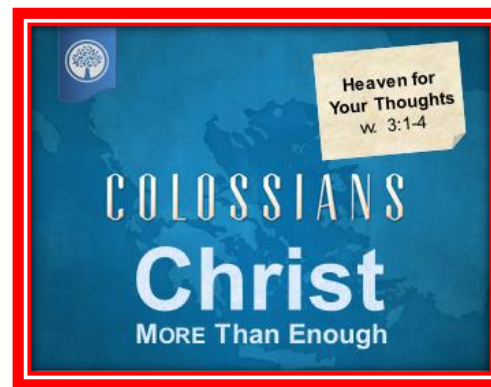
**Ps 145** <sup>14</sup> *The Lord upholds all who are falling and raises up all who are bowed down.* <sup>15</sup> *The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food in due season.* <sup>16</sup> *You open your hand; you satisfy the desire of every living thing.*

### Opening Announcement:

*Missionary Gabby Hurt visiting with us this weekend – Because Justice Matters – San Francisco*

*Installation Service – 9/27/15 @ 2:30pm*

*NewComer's Lunch – 10/4 immediately following 2<sup>nd</sup> service*



Let's now continue our worship by reading from God's Word. Please open your Bible to **Colossians chapter 3**, where we enter into some practical instruction for our thinking this morning.

Please stand with me now in honor of God's Word as I read our text for us from Colossians 3:1-4, reading from the **English Standard Version**:

**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.*

**This is the glory of God's Gospel. Please be seated.**

**Let's Pray.**

A couple of weeks ago my wife and I were enjoying an early morning walk around our church campus when we encountered two of God's creatures. The first was a rather plump and ugly caterpillar...slowly crawling along the sidewalk ready to devour any green plant that would get in its way. And the second was a beautiful Monarch butterfly. This beautiful creature fluttered along rather close to us as we walked and we marveled at its bright beauty in the morning sunlight.

Now the caterpillar and the butterfly are of course quite different from each other...and yet supernaturally related all at the same time aren't they? For through a wonderful process we call metamorphosis, caterpillars actually become butterflies. Supernaturally transformed in their very nature, metamorphosis enables caterpillars to leave their ugly earthbound existence behind in cocoon casket only to soar heavenward with beautiful wings powered by the very winds of God.

Now suppose that you my dear friend, are a caterpillar. A hairy, juicy, ugly, slime-producing caterpillar. And you love being a caterpillar. But one day some of your caterpillar friends that you haven't seen in a while return to your life completely different than they were before! I mean your friends are really cleaned up. They talk about a "resurrection experience" and having a new freedom now that seems wild and magical. Their beauty is compelling and attractive, but their stories of seeing colorful fields of flowers from above seem too fantastic to believe. There's no doubt in your mind that your friends have changed – that's for sure. And their joyful witness awakens a desire deep within you.

So the next several days, you try as hard as possible to reform your life to become more like your transformed friends. You read books written by other caterpillars on how to have your best life now. You take classes on how to win worms and influence caterpillars. You even sign up for some positive-thinking classes to help you learn more about resurrection, flying, and the different flower beds of grace and mercy that your friends described.

Admittedly, you become frustrated within a short time that this new reformation is really not working out for you like it did for your friends. So you get really serious... and go on a very strict diet. Your treatment of your own body becomes severe as you seek to make yourself more flight-worthy. The pressure from all your new rules and self-imposed regulations is suffocating to you, and you slip into greater and greater despair and cynicism.

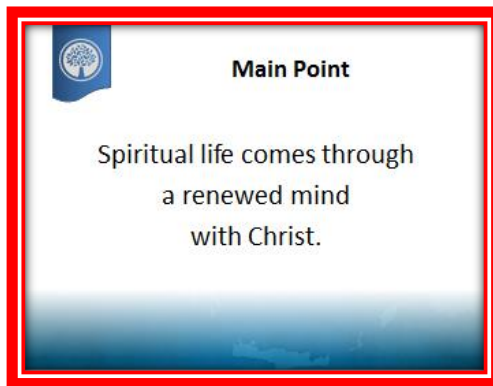
How ridiculous is it for a caterpillar to seek to pursue the butterfly life without going through metamorphosis? Such an attempt can only lead to anger and frustration.

But loved ones...that's exactly how so many people in this world live today. Created by God to be transformed by His Gospel into beautiful creatures of worship... yet instead so many self-reliant worms crawl around in a cesspool of their own religious sophistication convincing themselves that they have managed to find their life's fulfillment in their own proud accomplishments.

But spiritual life doesn't come by the law. Like we learned last week from the end of Colossians 2, self-

made religion has no value in changing the heart and nature of us earthbound caterpillars. Spiritual life is supernatural. It's a gift from God that is granted by grace and received by faith.

So as our Bibles are open to **Colossians 3:1-4** we learn that **Spiritual Life comes through a renewed mind with Christ.**

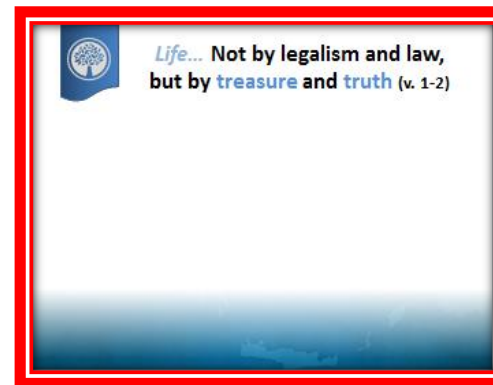


Just like caterpillars are transformed into butterflies by an internal and supernatural regeneration – so also for the Christian. We can't become Christians through external actions of reform or behavioral modification of any kind. No – our text this morning teaches us that true spiritual life comes by dying – by hiding our life with Christ by faith in the “cocoon” of His cross – and then being raised together with Christ as a new creation in Him.

Spiritual life comes through the internal transformation of our hearts by the Spirit of our living God. And now that the apostle Paul has debunked the value of all human tradition and philosophy, he wants the Colossian

believers to know how they are to live in Christ. Having been so transformed by the powerful working of God – how then should we “butterflies” live? If not by religious performance, how should we pursue the Christ-centered life?

As we direct our attention to verses 1-2 of chapter 3, we learn first that spiritual life comes **Not by legalism and law, but by treasure & truth (v 1-2).**



What do you treasure most in life, and how do you know its true value?

Paul writes,

*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.*

The “if” of verse 1 is best understood in the terms of “since.” There is no doubt intended in the text. *Since*

you have been raised with Christ – don't live for yourself anymore. Since with Christ you have been resurrected from the cocoon of death to become a beautiful butterfly, don't keep crawling around and acting like an earth-bound caterpillar. Since your faith in Christ has united you with Christ's resurrection life, you should treasure most the things that are above – not things on this earth.

So how do you really live? On Mondays, Thursdays, and Saturdays... how consistent is our lives with the resurrection power of Christ and the indwelling presence of His Spirit? How different is our life's focus from other unregenerate caterpillars around us? What consumes our minds, and what desires rule our daily lives?

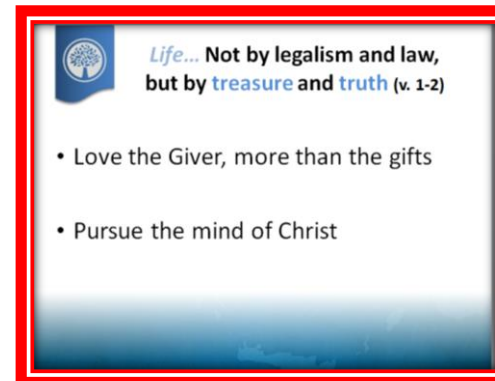
Notice there are two commands in verses 1 and 2. Seek, and Set your minds.

Seeking gives us the idea of a treasure hunt. The verb signifies a constant wanting, a continuous effort of desiring to possess the object of affection. I like the NIV translation that reads, "*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is...*" In other words, this command to seek things that are above is really aimed at the affections and treasure of our hearts – where we find value and significance. What we truly love.

Church, if I were to ask your closest friends what you loved more than anything, what might they say? What lights up your eyes when you talk? What do you get most excited and enthusiastic about? You see...these questions reveal our most beloved treasures. And since

God has graciously made you to live in Christ by His resurrection power, it only makes sense that your life would be energetically consumed by Christ and His heavenly agenda *above* all other legitimate loves.

Unregenerate earth-bound creatures only have the fleeting thrills of sports, hunting, gaming, politics, business deals, friendship, and other emotional highs to energize them. And without a doubt all of these are good gifts given by God to His children to be enjoyed. But loved ones, we must never let our treasuring of God's gifts distract us from treasuring Him above it all. If we are going to seek the things that are above, we are going to **Love the Giver, more than the gifts.**



Treasure Christ & His kingdom agenda – more than the good gifts He has given me here and now. God's Word says,

*Seek the things that are above, where Christ is...*

Christ is the magnificent obsession of all believers! Jesus deserves first place in everything. We are to seek the things above because Christ is central there – he is at the right hand of God in a position of honor and power. Christ is rightly exalted to the highest place in the heavens.

Let me pull the bus over a bit this morning and speak to anyone here with us this morning who hasn't yet surrendered to Christ. Perhaps you find Christ-followers a bit weird at times... for it is true that all genuine Christ-followers do march to a different drum than the rest of the world. For sure we all can really enjoy some of the good gifts of earthly living at times... but things of this earth are no longer our life like it was before God caused us to die to the world.

Ever since we have been raised with Christ and made alive together with Christ by the supernatural transformation of God's Spirit in our life – it only makes sense that we treasure Christ and Heavenly realities more than anything else here below. In truth all Christ-followers are motivated pilgrims passing through a foreign land now...earth is no longer our true home. Everything we love most is in Heaven – with Christ! We are only here on this earth with you until God's kingdom purposes of redemption are complete, and we are able to fulfill our ministry of showing and telling the beauty of Christ and His love to all of our loved ones here.

If this is difficult to understand ...I do understand. No one's heart naturally loves Christ. So if Christ is not honestly the supreme love of your heart this morning,

then pray that God would grant you faith and repentance so that you could see Christ as He really is. For truly whatever you love and treasure will always control you – whether you are conscious of it or not. Luke 6:45 teaches that “out of the heart the mouth speaks.” And from Proverbs 4:23 we learn that the sum of a person's life only reveals what a person values in their heart.

So what are you living for?

Look now at the second command in our text,

*Set your minds on things above.* Set your minds.

Christians grow and change not because of the outward pressures from legalism and law – but because of the intentional feeding of their internal love for Christ.

**Resurrected lives produce renewed minds**, so our responsibility by faith is to actively and intentionally **pursue the mind of Christ**. To fill and fix our minds upon Christ.

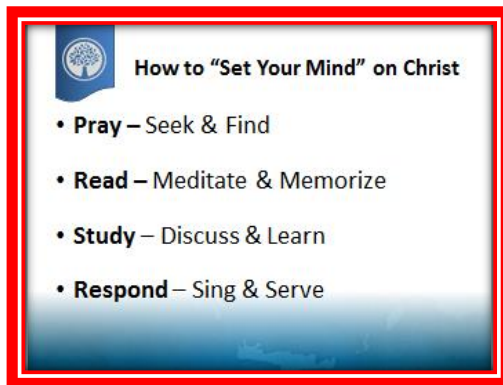
Q: How should I seek things that are above?

A: By habitually and intentionally setting my mind and attention on things above, not on things of this earth. Our minds must live in heaven while our feet live here on earth.

This doesn't mean that we become “so heavenly minded that we are of no earthly good” as quoted from D.L. Moody. Rather, it means that all of our life here and now is informed by and under the controlling direction of

Christ in heaven. We live on earth now as creatures of heaven – always looking at this earth from the vantage point of Christ and His eternal glory.

So let me offer some practical advice about how to “set your mind” on Christ. For we do what we do because we want what we want, and a heart who desires to grow in the joys of the supernatural life will be intentional about renewing your mind.



First, do you really want a spiritual mind? Such a mind is cultivated only by prayer... for we all need God’s active grace in our lives if we are to live consistent with our new identity in Him. So pray that God would help you to value Christ more than everything else (Phil 3:7ff). Pray that God would help you to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ (2 Cor 10:3-5). Pray that God would flood your minds with what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and praise-worthy (Phil 4:8). For when you seek Him, you will find Him, when you search for him with all your heart (Jer 29:13).

And of course, the only way we can genuinely know the true Christ is through His Word. It is not possible to habitually be setting your minds on Christ and heavenly things without meditating and memorizing God’s Word. So read. Chew the cud. Meditate upon what you’ve read. Make sure your quiet times in God’s Word include the time necessary for reflection. Prayer. Self-examination and careful consideration. And memorize Scripture.

Personally I was convicted by the idea of memorizing Scripture this week as I was preparing this message. For me, much of my scripture memory was done years ago...but I’ve become more lazy in the hard work of Scripture memory recently. I know the importance of a heavenly mind...and so I’ve recommitted to this joyful discipline of scripture memory this week – intentionally seeking to set my mind more and more upon things above.

A third way to set your mind is to study God’s Word – being a real learner and becoming active (rather than passive) in your spiritual learning. You cannot love deeply what you only know superficially. So pursue knowing God with all of you! Talk about God’s word with others, read good commentaries, listen to Christ-centered sermons during the day.

And of course all genuine worship responses help as well. For me personally, I regularly employ the power of music with Christ-centered lyrics to tune my heart upward. Singing and serving others is part of what it means to have God’s Word dwelling in me richly (3:16).



Brothers and sisters – with all the noise and clamor of our busy world – we must work hard to keeping setting our minds on things above. But this is how gratitude and worship responds in a heart that has been raised together with Christ. This is how butterflies fly! Having been made alive together with Christ – we joyfully set our sights upon the heights!

So believe and repent this morning. Will you practically commit yet more to “seek” and “set your mind” upon things above?

Spiritual life doesn’t come by conforming our experiences to some external standards or laws... but by constantly transforming our love through treasure and truth. Feeding our souls more and more on Christ and His kingdom such that our affections find their home in His glory, rather than the dust of this earth.

Now verses 3-4 go on to remind us that spiritual living is **Not for here and now, but for then and there (v3-4).**



Verse 3 says, *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.*

Remember – when you come to Christ by faith, the old you dies in that cocoon of union with Christ. The caterpillar is dead. The power of sin is gone. Sin can no longer condemn us or control us. This is such good news church! As **Romans 6, verses 2, 6-7** say,

*How can we who died to sin still live in it?... We know that our old self was crucified with him in order that the body of sin might be brought to nothing, so that we would no longer be enslaved to sin.* <sup>7</sup> *For one who has died has been set free from sin.*

Free from sin, and alive in Christ! Dear sinner – no one wakes up one morning and decides today is the day I’m going to destroy my life with my addiction. No one starts their day saying today I’m going to steal thousands of dollars from my company. But that’s how sin works – slowly justifying that extra expense report because of how hard I’ve been working, and then 3 years later you wake up and wonder how in the world you ever got in this mess!

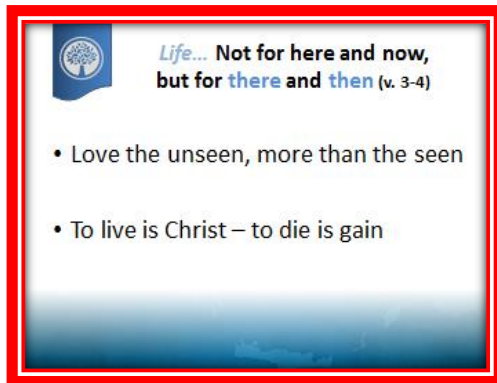
Dear loved ones – you don’t have to live enslaved to sin and this world anymore. Freedom is found in God’s grace – which is offered freely to all who would repent of their sin and believe in the Gospel. Today if you believe that Jesus Christ died the death that you should have died, and rose up from the grave to live the life that you

should have lived in perfect obedience to God – then verse 4 says, Christ *is* your life.

Consider that for a moment. Life is what you are alive to. Having been so spiritually transformed by God’s Spirit – why would I live for the here and now? It’s all temporary and passing away anyway, right? That is the message of all Scripture....for example 2 Cor 4:18,

*we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.*

So church, since we are raised with Christ, let us seek to increasingly **Love the unseen, more than the seen.**



Love the Eternal, more than the temporal. And in fact when verse 3 teaches that our life is hidden with Christ in God – it means that our lives are kept safe with Christ – we are hidden away with Christ in a way that our security and satisfaction are guaranteed in Him. Nothing can

separate God’s child from the love of God in Christ Jesus (Rom 8:31-39).

Practically this becomes very relevant for all Christ-followers who live in a world that hates grace, and hates the God of grace. Loved ones – as our ethical climate turns more and more away from righteousness – we must remember that all those who desire to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted (2 Tim 3:12).

So this morning we are urged to pursue an eternal perspective. As Philippians 1:21 says, **To live is Christ, to die is gain.**

Christ-followers truly live by dying. Dying off more and more to the old life of the here and now, and becoming more and more captivated and energized by the life which is ours by the finished work of Jesus Christ our Lord.

Church, may God help us to die to the worldly lies that proclaim our significance is in our busyness, and our success is in our bank account. May God help us to repent of defining success as anything other than knowing Christ and being careful to live in the obedience of faith before Him. And may God help us to love His praise more than the fickle crowds surrounding us.

I like how Corrie Ten Boom captures this thought on where to look in life with her catchy exhortation:

Look around and be distressed.  
Look inside and be depressed.



Look at Jesus and be at rest. – Corrie Ten Boom

So church – where is your focus today?

*19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matt 6:19-21)*

If you're living for here and now, then you are merely earning wages to put them into a bag with holes (Haggai 1:6). Earthly possessions will not last. Eternal treasures last forever.

Spiritual life is not about performing in the here and now. Spiritual life is about knowing Christ and leaning for the glory that will be revealed with Christ in glory.

Doesn't your soul delight in the promise of verse 4?

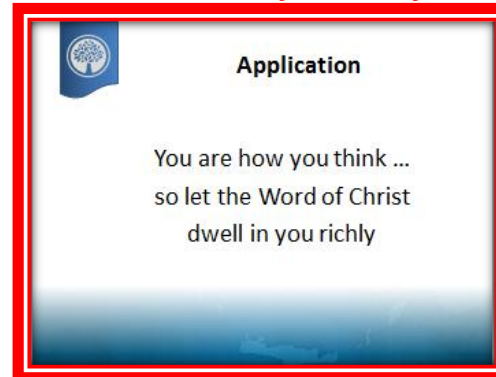
*When Christ ... appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.*

Church - We will finally in real practice all be like Christ! At Christ's return, we will shed the old skin of our flesh, and receive our new glorified bodies of perfect holiness! When our chief Shepherd appears, we will receive the unfading crown of glory and holiness in His presence (1 Peter 5:4)!

So take courage church. No matter how difficult your present, your future is bright in Christ! For when he appears on that final day of His return, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him as He is (1 John 3:2). Just like a child “comes alive” when you speak of ice cream or going to Disneyland... so should every believer when we consider His soon-coming return and manifestation of His glory! To live is Christ!

Spiritual life comes through a renewed mind with Christ. Truly your thinking matters. Whatever you feed will grow (Gal 6:7-8). So what are you feeding your mind as you await Christ's appearing and seek to live out your life in Him?

Loved ones, **You are how you think... so let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly.**



How treasured or hallowed is Christ's Name in the living room of your mind? How authoritative is Christ's kingdom reign over every thought and fantasy that seeks

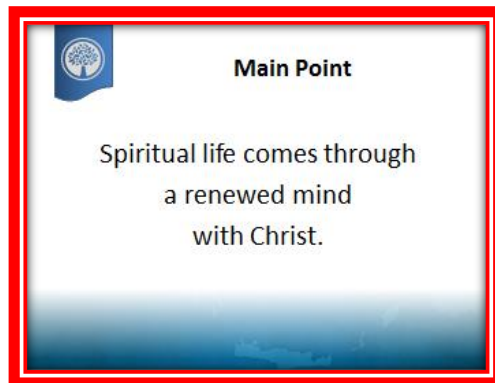
to exalt itself in your thinking? How surrendered to God's will is your thought life today?

Since you have been raised with Christ, God's Spirit Himself is tabernacling within you. And God's Spirit delights in bringing God's Word to remembrance for your joyful sanctification and eternal glory.

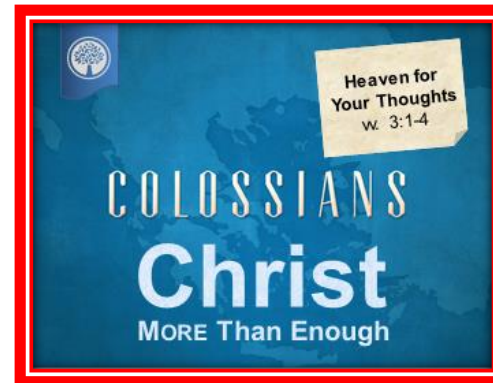
Note verse 16 of chapter 3,

*Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.*

Church **spiritual life comes through a renewed mind with Christ.**



So having been transformed by God into His resurrected children... let's cast off all caterpillar ways of living and thinking. Fill your mind with the beauty of Christ's perfections and His promises. And live each day for the glorious reward that will soon be revealed in us with Christ.



Well next week we will tackle the sticky business of idolatry and repentance – matters that are absolutely necessary for every believer to master throughout life! So pray that God will set your minds on His beauty and draw you deeper into His love this week.

Let's pray.

**Closing prayer.**

Closing Song – *Be Thou My Vision*

**Jude 24-25** *Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, 25 to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.*