

What's True of Our Past, Present, and Future

Colossians 3:1-4

Rev. John Pennylegion
September 6, 2026

Good morning. If we haven't met, my name is Penny, and I'm the senior pastor here, and it's good to be with you. If you are a guest or a visitor, we're glad that you would join us this morning. And we are continuing in our series in the book of Colossians, and so we're in Colossians 3. And if you have a Bible, you can turn there. If you don't have a Bible, there are Bibles in the chairs in front of you. You can find our passage located there. And if you came here this morning, and you don't have a Bible, and you would like one, please just take that one. That is our gift to you. We would love for you to have that. We would love for you to have God's word. So please take that.

But we are in Colossians 3, and we are now moving into the second half of Colossians. Colossians is a very short book, only four chapters. There's only six more sermons left in our series, for those who might be counting. But we are moving towards the end, right? We're in the homestretch. The end is near. And if you've been with us over the last number of weeks, then you will remember that Colossians is written to this church that's struggling because there are these various ideas and teachings and false teachers that are infiltrating the church, and are trying to encourage the people of God to add to the gospel, to add to Jesus. We heard about last week how they were trying to add to Jesus through asceticism, and through mysticism, and through legalism. And specifically that legalism, right? The false teachers were encouraging the church to adopt the personal preference and personal convictions of the false teachers. And in the midst of that, we discussed how the only thing that binds us is God's law, right? God's word. Now that doesn't mean it's a free-for-all, remember. God gives us direction. He gives us direction with regard to the virtues we're supposed to pursue and the vices we're supposed to resist. In fact, the rest of chapter 3, after our passage, for the next two weeks, that's what Paul is going to be talking about. He's going to be talking about the ethical behaviors and ethical demands that God puts upon his people. But before Paul's going to get there, before he's going to talk about virtue, and before he's going to talk about vice, this morning he's going to remind us who we are. He's going to remind us of our identity, who it is that we are in Christ. And so with that in mind, let's read Colossians 3, beginning in verse 1. 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. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”
(ESV)

Friends, this is the word of the Lord. Let me pray.

Heavenly Father, we thank you that you have given us your word and that you have given us your spirit. And so we pray that you would use your spirit and your word to change us, to soften our hearts, to lead us in your truth, that you would remind us of what you have declared over us, and that we would trust in you. And so we pray that you would use this passage and you would use these next few minutes to make us more and more in the image of Christ. And we pray in his name. Amen.

Well, some of you know that I attended college in a small town in South Carolina called Greenwood, South Carolina. Not Greenville. Everyone's heard of Greenville. Very few people have heard of Greenwood. Okay, so I went to school in Greenwood, South Carolina at a school called Lander University. And my baseball coach in college capitalized on that name, Lander. You see, coach would instill upon us that there was a particular way that he wanted us to play. It was the Lander way. This is what he described. This is what he imparted to us. And so that meant that we didn't just run on and off the field. We sprinted. We ran out every single ball. We dove for balls in the hole. And the Lander way extended beyond the baseball field into the classroom. We had to say "yes, sir" and "no, sir," "yes, ma'am" and "no, ma'am," right? That was pretty new to this Canadian. But I adopted those ways because this was the Lander way.

Now, of course, being, you know, 18 to 21-year-old, 22-year-old college athletes, we oftentimes didn't do things the Lander way. And when we failed to live up to this standard that coach had given to us, he would institute what he called "red nals's." A "red nal" is Lander spelled backwards. It is the antithesis of the Lander way. And so at the end of practice, coach would stand up on the hill that was down the right field line in foul territory. He would stand on the hill while we were at the bottom and he would go through all the red nals we had accumulated for the day. I remember I got one, at least. But I remember because I didn't dive for a ball in practice, in foul territory, I got a red nal. And it wasn't just me that got it for my infraction, but the entire team did.

You see, what was true of one became true of everyone. So one person accumulated a red nal and we all ran. But every once in a while, coach would stand up on the hill and he would go through all the red nals, you know, three, four, ten, you know, and he would tell us how many hills we were going to run. But every once in a while, he would say that there was something so unexpected, something so out of the ordinary, something so incredible that he was going to erase one of the red nals. That some player did something on the field or maybe off the field that coach got wind of that it was so out of the ordinary that he was going to remove one of those hills. And he didn't just remove it for that one player, he removed it for all of us. As though we had all done that extraordinary thing. As though we had all done that beautiful thing. We all got credited for that one act.

Our Past Hiddenness

And that's what Paul has been telling us again and again and again through Colossians. That God's people, as we are united to Christ, what Christ has done has been credited to us. Right? We've heard in Colossians 1. We've heard in Colossians 2. We're hearing it again in Colossians 3. That before Paul gets to the ethical demands of Colossians 3, he's going to tell us again that we have been united to Christ. That what Christ has done has been credited to us. So much so that in verse 3 of our passage, Paul says that your life is hidden with Christ in God. That we are hidden. That Christ covers us so that his life becomes our life. Now, if you've been with us for the last number of weeks as we've been going through Colossians, you've heard this already. Right? You've heard this. And so maybe you're thinking, *I mean, three straight chapters, right? Colossians 1, Colossians 2, now Colossians 3. I mean, okay, Paul, we get it. We're in Christ, right? Our life is his life. We're hidden with him. We get it. The horse is dead. You can stop eating it, right?* Maybe you're wondering that.

Maybe you're thinking that. Maybe you're wondering, *why does he keep bringing this up again and again and again? We only have four chapters. So why does he keep hitting this home?* And that's a fair question to ask. Like, *why is Paul trying to instill in us this idea that*

what Christ has done has been credited to us? Well, I think there's at least two reasons. The first reason is we often forget what's true of us. It's easy for us to hear truth spoken over us, but then we quickly forget it. It reminded me of when I was in seminary in my second semester, first year, sitting in Gospels class. And every external indicator would have said that that is exactly where I should have been. Church sent us. We had affirmation we should be there. Kat was on board moving our family across the country to a place we had never been. I had a scholarship that paid for my tuition. Everything said, "this is where I belong." And I remember sitting in class thinking, "there's no way I belong." Sitting there thinking in this class, in the second row with a hundred students behind me, that they all knew what the professor had been talking about, that they had all heard it before, that these insights that were brand new to me, they all knew it. But me? Nope. And they knew I didn't know it. That's what I was thinking. Right? Imposter syndrome. Every external thing would have said that's exactly where I was supposed to be. And yet, I kept forgetting. I forgot what was true. And it's not just me that does this, right? We do it. We forget what is true. Intelligent people think that they're dumb. Gifted people believe that they don't have what it takes. The beautiful, they look in the mirror, and all they see is ugliness. We forget what's true of us. And so, Paul knows that we're prone to forget what's true. And so, we need to be reminded again and again and again. So, that's the first reason I think Paul is reminding us.

The second reason is because I already said, after our passage for the next couple weeks, we're going to talk about the ethical demands of the gospel, of God's kingdom. And it would be very easy for us to take those demands and turn them into a checklist. You know, like, "okay, critical words, check, didn't do it." You know, "stealing, nope, never done it." Adultery, "nope, I'm good." Some impure thought, "well, you know, maybe, you know, but I've checked off more than I didn't. So, I must be standing pretty well before the Lord." It's easy for us to do that, isn't it? To base our standing before the Lord on how we are doing ethically and how we're meeting God's demands. But y'all, that's not true of us. Our standing before the Lord isn't built on our behavior, on what we've done, in how good we're keeping his commands. No, our standing before the Lord is based on what he has said about us, what is true about us, what our past is marked by.

And what our past is marked by, the truth that Paul is telling about us is that we are hidden with God, that we are hidden with Christ. That is our past. We see it in verse 3, "for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ." In verse 1, "if then," - that "if" - it's not that unsurety, but instead it's a way of assuming what is true since then, right? "If then, since then you have been raised with Christ," you hear what Paul's saying. You have died, you have been raised. These things have happened already to you. This is our past. That Christ's death and resurrection is applied and credited to us so much so that we have died and we have been raised. We are hidden with Christ. This is so important for us to remember that if we are trusting in Christ, our lives are no longer marked by sin and rebellion and the ways that we look to the world. Now, that's not you anymore.

Do you remember what Jesus said in John 15? He said, "Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends. No longer do I call you servants, but I have called you friends." Y'all, that's who you are. That's who you are. You are those for whom Christ died and rose again. You are the ones for whom Christ gave his life. You are the ones whom Jesus calls friend. You are hidden with him. That is what's true of you.

Our Present Living

And because that's true of you, because that is our past that has been marked by Christ's death and resurrection, this has implications for our present living. That's where Paul goes next. He says, "because you have been raised, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth." He's saying, turn from what's below and seek what's above. Now, we're going to get into specifics again as the weeks go on, but for now, let's look at what Paul is saying and what he isn't saying. So, when he says turn from things below, he is not saying that we remove ourselves from the world. He's not saying that we retreat, that we enter into this sort of like monastic existence. That's not what he's saying. He's not saying that we make light of creation or we ignore our responsibilities in our careers or our homes or our communities because those are the things that are below. No, that's not what he's saying. And we know he's not saying that because we know that the whole of the scriptures affirms our work and the joy we have in creation and the wonder that we experience in the world.

Now, when Paul talks about us turning from what's below, he's talking about the sin that has plagued the earth and the effects of sin. And we can be confident that that's what he's talking about because of the rest of chapter 3, but also because of the contrast he's setting up. We turn from things of the Earth and we set our mind on things above. We seek the things that are above. Now, this doesn't mean that we just go walking around kind of staring up into the sky, right? It made me think of that scene in Luke's gospel at the end when the disciples are walking along the road to Emmaus. You remember this? And Jesus appears to them and he starts talking to them and their eyes are kind of covered. They don't know who Jesus is. And he opens up the word and shows how all the gospel or all the Old Testament was pointing to Jesus. And then Jesus ascended into heaven. And the two disciples, what did they do? They just stand there staring up. It's kind of a really funny scene if you think about it. If you're like some, you know, you know, average Jewish Galilean walking along and there's these two guys just staring like, "Is there," you know, "a storm coming?" "Is something, did something just happen," right? Like it makes sense why they're standing there. But for us, it would be strange, wouldn't it? It'd be kind of fun. Well, I think it's funny. Y'all just go around looking up at the sky all the time. So, but anyway, but that's not what we're talking about here.

It's not some sort of like gazing away as though we are ignoring the things of the world. No, you see, seeking things above and setting our mind on things above is considering and pondering and pursuing Christ's supremacy and his reign over our lives. Now I say his reign over our lives because look at the end of verse 1, "seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God." He is seated at the right hand of God and that means he is seated on the throne that Christ is the King. I love that that's our name, that that's our church's name, Christ the King. But Christ the King isn't just, you know, words on the sign out front. It's not just words on the front of the bulletin. Christ the King is a reality that we live with, that he is the King over the universe, that he's the King over this church, that he is the King over our lives. To set our mind on things above, to seek the things that are above is to pursue and to live under Christ's Kingship. It's to, it's to live in light of the very thing that we ask in the Lord's Prayer, "Your kingdom come, your will be done on Earth as it is in Heaven."

Our Future Hope

You see, we long for that, for Christ's reign to be on Earth as it is in Heaven. We long for his reign to be over our lives as it is in heaven. As we turn from what's below, our sin, and as we turn to what's above Christ's rule, we are living out our union with Christ under his reign.

And this contrast that Paul's setting up between turning from below and turning to what's above, it's actually super helpful in understanding how we live in the present with regard to our sin. So, this isn't just theoretical for Paul, that we turn and then we turn, right, that we turn and then we seek, but it's actually practical. Because many of us, when we think about living in the present moment and resisting the sin in our lives, we think about, we simply turn from sin. We look away from it. We resist temptation and we move into maybe this state of kind of neutrality. Now, of course, it's important to turn away. Paul just said that, right? But he didn't stop there. He said we stop, we look away, but then we fix our minds on Heaven. We don't just not sin, but we fill our minds with Christ's reign. We don't speak critically, we fill our mouths with encouragement. We don't just not lust, we affirm true beauty. We don't just not hate, we pursue love. That is turning from below and seeking what's above. That's what's living out what is true of us. That present living, birth out of a past truth, and it culminates in a future hope.

You see it in verse 4, "When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory." You see, as we have been united to Christ in his death and resurrection, we are united to him in his coming, and we will experience his glory. I wonder, I wonder how much we think about his coming. I wonder how much we think about the day he will return. You know, as I was thinking about his coming, my mind went back to "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe," and that scene with the beavers. So, if you haven't read "the Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe", or seen the movie, the beavers, they're real beavers. It's not just their name, they're beavers, and they're magical creatures, right? So, they talk, and the beavers are having a tea with the four children, and they're telling the children about a prophecy in Narnia, a prophecy regarding the four thrones of Cair Paravel, that great castle. And they say this, "when two sons of Adam and two daughters of Eve sit on those four thrones, then it will be the end, not only of the White Witch's reign, but of her life. The White Witch, the epitome of evil and wickedness, she will be no more." And if you've seen the movie, the movie does this amazing job of showing the excitement of the beavers. As they start talking, you can see their longing for this future hope, that they can't wait for that day when the thrones will be filled, because it will mean that the White Witch, and wickedness, and evil will be no more, because Aslan, he will have come.

It's this amazing anticipation, longing for, desiring, looking forward to the future with hope. And I wonder if we have that same longing. I wonder if we have that same desire, that we too are longing, and hoping, and looking for that day when Christ will return, and we will appear with him. Y'all, that is the promise of Colossians, that our future is tied to Christ, that when he returns, and he appears, and his glory comes, we also will appear with him. 1 John 3 says it this way, "we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is." Can you imagine that? We will be like him. There is a day coming when we will be free from sin and pain. We will be free from sickness and sorrow, a day that is coming when we will have no need for hospital, or vaccine, or medicine. There won't be sleepless nights of worry. No, there is a day coming when we, who are trusting in Christ, when we, who know what is true of us, will find our trueness culminating in his coming. One theologian put it this way, "we hope not only for the coming of the Lord, but for the full revelation of who we already are." The trueness of who we are will find its culmination in Christ's coming, and we will dwell with him. That is what we long for, that is what we hope for.

I wonder if we think about that, if we think about it enough, because y'all, that is the beautiful hope that awaits us. That is our beautiful future hope. Now maybe some of you are thinking, *well it's fine to think about that from time to time, but, but I don't want to be so heavenly*

*mind*ed that I'd be of no earthly good. You've heard that phrase before. I have to tell you, I don't care for it. I don't like that phrase. I don't like that phrase because the truth is, is that if we are heavenly minded, we will be of earthly good, because we will know the good that the world and that we long for and are in need of. The good of Christ's reign in this world and over our lives. Friends, that is the good news. That is the good news, that what's true of us, that we have died and risen with Christ, it will be fully revealed. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. And so friends, turn your gaze to what is above. Believe what God has said is true of you, and look to our sure and future hope. Amen. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, we do thank you. Thank you that we do await a future hope when Christ will return, and he will appear, and we will appear with him in glory. We long for that day, and so we ask Lord Jesus, come quickly. Come quickly and make all things new, but until you come, we ask that you would help us to turn from what is below, to seek what is above, to believe what you have said is true of us, and to hope for that day of your return. We ask that you would work and move in us, and we pray all this in Christ's name, and God's people said together, Amen.