

Colossians 3:1-4 - David Vinyard

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[0:00] We welcome you to the media ministry of Bethel Community Church, Knowing Jesus, Making Jesus Known. This morning, we continue our study on the New Testament book of Colossians.

You know, thinking on that same line, but personally, my own schedule, between last weekend and next weekend, I'll have been in four different hotels in four different cities. So it's just, again, kind of madness, phase of life that we're in, just the coincidence of the timing, right?

But I use that, I explain that all, just because I feel like where we're at today, Colossians 3, if you want to turn there, in some sense, Paul's life seems to have reached a similar place, a similar feeling in our text as well.

You know, he's writing to the Colossians. There's just so much going on. There's different emotions, there's challenges, there's warnings, there's encouragements. Jeff talked last week about different cautions in terms of, you know, errors in our thinking.

And so just looking at kind of what's been covered in chapter 1 and 2, we've got the deity and the supremacy of Christ. We've got God's purpose, sovereign purpose in the cross. Again, Jesus wasn't a victim, it wasn't an accident.

[1:18] He calls and addresses worldly wisdom, calls it folly and vanity, right? Last week we saw the emptiness of the law and the error of legalism.

So we've covered a lot in, I think, two chapters, quite a bit, in fact. And so I put up here just a couple, that might be a little small for you guys, but I'll read them. And just, again, in the spirit of March Madness, some from the highlight reel, there's a lot more than this that we've read through, but some good verses covered to date.

Chapter 2, verse 13 and 14, And you being dead in your trespasses, he is made alive together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of the requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us.

And he has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. He's thinking about the permanence of salvation, right? Chapter 1, verse 9 and 10, For this reason we, since the day we heard of it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of his will and all wisdom and spiritual understanding.

It's going to come back in our passage today. That you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God. Those are some meaty verses there.

[2:33] And then chapter 2, verse 6 and 7, As you therefore have received Christ Jesus, so walk in him, rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving.

So that's some of what we talked about. And finally, we land in chapter 3. I was talking to Brad in the break room, and it's like, you've got this progression, and then you've got these four verses in chapter 3.

And then you kind of go back to what was just covered previously. So it's an interesting set of four verses. It might be the fewest set of verses I've ever spoke on, so that was actually kind of nice. I've had a, you know, very concentrated nugget there.

And so here we are. I would say that these four verses actually are critical to the life of a growing believer. So they're worth noting, they're worth studying in and of themselves.

And with that, let's look at Colossians chapter 3, verse 1 to 4. All right. It says, Let's pray.

[3:51] God, I thank you for today. I thank you for bringing us out here in the midst of life and busyness and schedules and activity. I just thank you for the chance to pause and reflect on where our focus should be, where our hearts should be at.

I thank you for that encouragement. I pray that you would speak today, present the truth of your word, and an encouragement to us here in Bethel. In Jesus' name, amen. So if I had to assign a theme to this text, and it's funny, I told my mom this too, is I always seem to get the text of the things that I struggle with the worst.

So it's, you know, just a greater occasion for hypocrisy, like I said to my dad. But that being said, if I had to assign a theme to this text, I would call it the battle.

Right? And it's specifically, it's talking about the battle of our hearts and minds, the battle for our affections. And I would argue it's as relevant today as it's ever been in the history of mankind, to be honest with you.

So just for a little context and setting, consider the group at this church, right? It was a city in the Roman province of Asia. It was located on two rivers, a trade route. You've got diversity.

[5:03] You've got a mix of Jews and Gentiles. You've got Persians. You've got Asians. From all walks of life, from all social status, incomes, educations, right?

And all of that presents challenges. It presents differences of opinions. It presents various heritages, right? Priorities. Very similar, I feel like, to what we have surrounding us in our culture today.

Great diversity. Not necessarily here in this room. We're a pretty homogenous group, in fact. But in general. My point is, it's a secular society, right? And not Sodom and Gomorrah, you know, on the brink of destruction necessarily, but just kind of real humanity, right?

And because of that, I think it's safe to assume that the church here, that Paul is writing to, had a real opportunity for distraction and maybe some misallocation of their focus.

So with that setting in mind, let's dive in. I'd like to break this down, just to kind of find out what exactly is he saying? What's he getting at? How does this sentence and this challenge come together for these folks and for us?

[6:11] So the first verse. Do I have this? No. Okay. If then, or translated since then, you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above.

Where Christ is. Sitting at the right hand of God. So, of course, it's talking to believers. Let's just state that and keep that in mind as we go through this.

But it begins with a verb, right? It says to seek. It's an action. The word used literally means to desire or to crave, to search for, and to strive after.

It's not a casual move. It's not kind of a, it's not a passive engagement, right? It's an action. And you look at verse two, kind of pairing these together. It repeats it with even more emphasis.

It says, set your affections on things above and not on things of the earth. So you have this combo, to seek and to set. It kind of represents a practical striving, right, on a daily basis, but it also represents the adjustment in our own minds and our own disposition to look beyond this world.

[7:21] So it's a practical and an intellectual change in some sense together. And that's the action. That's the charge and the challenge given to this church here. The what.

But I think more significant than the words of the action, because we can all understand that. We seek things. We have affections toward things. More important than the action, though, is the object, right? What are we to set our affections on?

So if you look at the text, just going through the words, the object, the words used twice are things. Unfortunately, that word, just in and of itself, right, it's like 1,100 times in the Bible, over 1,000 verses.

You know, it's like the word stuff or the phrase, you know. I mean, it's painfully generic. But fortunately for us, we actually get two qualifiers to the object. So it's not just things.

Don't just chase things. But we're chasing these certain things, right? Here's the two qualifiers.

Things above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, and then not on things on the earth.

[8:32] So hopefully this is starting to take shape, right? I'm not, I'm actually terrible at grammar, and English was my worst subject in school. But I think it helps to break this down a little bit to understand what's being said and how it's coming together.

And with these descriptors, right, we get a vivid picture that represents the battle, right, the theme, the battle of the believer living a redeemed life in a conflicting humanity, you know, sin-filled world. So the question is out there, right? What are we to focus on? What are these things above? What are the things not of the world that we're supposed to avoid? What is the Spirit telling us through Paul that's so pivotal here?

That he would take a break in some of the other structural things that he's delivering and say, by the way, four verses, take it, you know? So for starters, right, as we're looking at what are we to focus on, I think part of this was addressed prior in the text.

So if you look at chapter two, he gives them these words. He says, So without digging in too far to what's been covered in prior chapters, it's talking about something that's previously been mentioned, but then reestablishing it here.

[10:03] The riches of understanding, the revelation of this mystery, the peace and the unity. These are things above. And it's reinforced elsewhere in Scripture. If you look at this, Ephesians 3, that might also be a little hard to read, but it says, Paul's addressing a different church, right?

But he says, In reading this, then, you'll be able to understand my insight into the mystery of Christ, which was not made known to the people in other generations as it has been revealed by the Spirit of God's holy apostles and prophets.

This mystery is that through the gospel, the Gentiles and heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus. Those promises, I think, are something you would put in that category of things above.

He continues, I became a servant of this gospel by the gift of God's grace given me through the working of his power. Although I am less than the least of all the Lord's people, this grace was given to me to preach to the Gentiles the bounteous riches of Christ and to make plain to everyone the administration of this mystery, which for the ages was kept hidden in God who created all things. His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.

[11:20] In him and through faith in him, we may approach God with freedom and confidence. Did you hear that last line? Pretty significant. That's huge, actually.

That's worth our affection. So just what on earth are we supposed to focus on? That's a trick question. Nothing, right? What should we be seeking?

The spiritual truths, the realities, the privileges of salvation, the position of being heirs with Christ and to live forever, the riches of divine wisdom. We'll talk about this in a little bit.

But the understanding that's available to us is something to be sought. Those things which are above include every privilege, privilege, I'm sorry, and certainty of our citizenship in heaven and seeing things through the lens of eternity.

Paul's teaching reminds us that we must mind the concerns of another world more than the concerns of this one. And it, you know, literally looking at that text, as Christ has gone before us to secure a place in heaven, we ought to seek what has been purchased there.

[12:32] If you think of it that way. So you still with me? Make sense so far? Okay. I know it seems a little repetitive, but there's just so much in those words. Set your affections on things above and not on the things of this world.

And I think Paul knew that. I think he knew full well the times in which he lived. I don't think he had a full grasp on the times that would follow and the days in which we would live. But all the same things, right?

They dealt with entertainment and culture, technology, time management, different trials and work and family and everything that we have today that essentially pulls at that affection.

And it's not a coincidence, right? It's an obvious competition. So as I was studying this, I was reminded of a different example in Scripture. And I thought it applies here.

It's just a couple things to kind of make this stick with you in your mind and just thinking through, you know, what challenge has been given here and how do we respond? So it's the story of Mary and Martha. You guys, some of you may be familiar.

[13:35] But I've copied it up here and I just want to read through it, right? It says, Now what happened is they went that he entered a certain village and a certain woman named Martha welcomed Jesus into her house.

And she had a sister called Mary who sat at Jesus' feet and heard his words. But Martha was distracted with much serving and she approached him and said, Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone?

Therefore, tell her to help me. Jesus answered and said to her, Martha, you're worried and troubled about many things, but one thing is needed. And Mary has chosen that good part which will not be taken away.

So I know there's various applications from this text and it's been, it's, you know, maybe not the exact point of what we're talking about today, but let me ask you this, right? How would you describe Martha? She's suspicious, hardworking, prudent, responsible, diligent, organized. You know, you're thinking about different personality types. She's probably type A. She and I would get along just fine most of the time, I would imagine. But do you get a sense of where her affections were in this example?

[14:42] Again, myself is a pretty good example, but I feel like it was wrapped in the work, right? In the pride of her home, in the cleanliness factor or the meal, whatever it was that she was toiling after.

And we start to see the same things that we may see in ourselves, right? You get a little, when you're focused here, you get that sense of envy or jealousy or frustration with other people or essentially those things that are on the earth, right?

And here's what makes this so difficult. As I was studying this and thinking, why am I so bad at what I'm supposed to be doing differently? The things, in this sense, that often take our attention are not entirely bad things.

They're not entirely sins. They're not entirely misses, right? But they may be falsely receiving that affection ahead of things above.

That's the challenge. Oftentimes for me, it's work, right? And it's so easy to default and for me to set my focus and my affections on my job because it translates into my own seeking of my own abilities and my own security and ability to provide, right?

[15:56] My own name, my own successes. Again, not things above. And I was just, again, going through this for myself, but if it's not my job, if it's not work, it's my family.

It's the Martha complex, right? It's my life in order. Is everything together? Am I just so focused here that I miss everything else? And don't get me wrong, right?

I mean, it would be naive to say that life doesn't take work. Everything takes work. It takes focus. It takes, you know, effort. But it's a matter of the heart and I think that's what Paul's getting at here today.

To simplify this, right, and I try and keep things simple as best I can, but I like the three options that are given through that story of Martha and Mary, right? The question is this.

You can ask yourself, as I ask myself, am I looking outward, focusing on the surroundings, focusing on the work at hand, the task, just the day-to-day?

[16:57] Am I looking inward? Is it all about me? Am I selfishly wondering why this is happening or how it makes me feel or does anybody care? Am I looking inward? Or lastly, am I looking upward?

Am I focused beyond the here and now? Am I looking past the things of this earth? Am I looking at the truths of God, the realities of salvation, the things above?

You know, for me, again, I have this section in my notes. Oftentimes, I don't always read it, but it's called Translated for David. It's all over, actually, if you can see this. But am I so focused on myself, right?

My feelings, my pride on the job, or am I looking for ways to bring glory to God and exhibit thankfulness in my circumstance? Where are my affections at? At home, is David looking at the chaos of life?

Just, Amy will say, yes, you are. You know, dealing with kids and everything that goes into that, right? I've got two kids that enjoy my pain and suffering, psychological, physical, they relish in that. [18:01] You know, is that where I'm focused? Am I seeking that? Or am I entirely focused on beyond that, which would be God's blessings, you know, the good that he's given me there?

Colossians 3 represents that challenge. It presents us with where are our affections set? What are you seeking? Circumstance? Is it self? Or is it things above?

And if we're fair, right, there's plenty of other non, what I call non-noble things that take our affections as well, right? The musts, as I call them, and then the not musts, or the, this would be the things of this world in the bucket or the category of Facebook or social media, how much time do you spend there?

Maybe it's not. Maybe it's sports, right? Teddy talked about months ago, you said you listen to Mike and Mike, or Bernie in the morning, yeah. And, you know, there's so many things like that that are just entertaining, they're distracting, but they're kind of fun and they lead to discussion and debate and you can break the ice with anybody over these things.

Maybe it's pop culture, right? I don't know. It's not my thing, but Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous, that does it for some people, you know? Maybe it's binge-watching TV shows, entire weekends dedicated to whatever the show might be, right?

[19:20] So, the caution is just watch those things, right? Make sure they don't claim a wrongful place in your affections. Again, I'm talking to myself as much as anybody in the room. Consider what Paul said to Timothy.

Because I think this applies today to this same sort of theme that we're talking about. Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, to your care. Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas what is falsely called knowledge.

I know that's also talking about false doctrines, but I think that there's a lot that goes into that category of godless chatter. And we all have these items, right? We all have these big potato and small potato items that tend to jump in the way, which is what makes this so challenging.

You remember what mine is? I'll just be honest with you. I've been more transparent as I've got older. I don't put up many fronts as I used to. But I did some introspection, right? What is it that does this for me? I mentioned my job, but on the little potato one, you know, I'm not a sports nut.

I do like sports, but I'm not a hobby jockey. I'm not a pop gossip or a Netflix ninja. I happen to be all about geopolitical and macroeconomic news.

[20:27] And what runs the world? Yes, I'm being serious. I know. You're like, the articles and the topics that most people scroll past.

And, you know, when you leave a room and someone comes out, they're talking about, you know, that's me. Those are the things that consume much of my thoughts and my passions.

You know, more than I study my Bible, I'm looking at what's going on in financial markets and central bank activity and yield spreads and currencies. And, you know, you guys are like, get out of here, you know.

But I, it's the truth. These things that are influencing the world and I have no power to change or make, you know, any wakes or ripples into any of it.

It typically just leads to anger and frustration, you know. It does bring wisdom, but I think it's the type of wisdom that's cautioned about earlier in Colossians, you know, worldly wisdom.

[21:25] And I can honestly call it an affection and I can pretty much nail down that it's not things above. And here's how I really know, right, as I was looking at myself in this. It, it points me to seek and to think about this passing world and not eternity.

That's how it very clearly defines myself, right? 1 John 2, do not love the world or anything in the world.

If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in them. For everything, this is the key, for everything in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, the pride of life comes not from the

Father, but from the world.

The world and its desires pass away. But whoever does the will of God lives forever. May we not let the distractions of our society, our economy, our culture, our own problems even, shift our focus from the virtues and the realities and the blessings and the priorities of being a believer in Christ. Right? That's the gist of these two verses. Paul's saying, listen, don't let it happen. Seek. Set on things above. Not of this world.

[22:44] As colorful and as attractive and entertaining and tempting as that might be, very much easier said than done, right? Very much easier said than done.

So I was going through this and kind of cutting some stuff out because it started a lot longer. I realized that if you stop at verse 2, I don't think I have the, no. If you stopped at verse 2 and you looked at this task, it's kind of like, it'd be like charging up in the Himalayas at base camp and looking at Mount Everest and thinking, okay, I know where I'm supposed to go, but I'm probably going to die trying.

Right? I mean, it's just, it's such a monumental ask, it seems. It's such a challenge, practically speaking. But thankfully, verse, the first two verses are paired with verse 3 and 4 and I think that's by design, obviously.

Those two verses read, for, you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Still addressing believers, right? These two verses provide a pillar, two pillars of support that we need actually in going at this battle. It's the reinforcement on the how department of setting our affections above and they're this, right?

[24:05] Think about these two. These two realities for understanding is our death with Christ and our life of glory with Christ. Keeping the basketball analogy alive a little bit, right?

These are the words from the coach. I didn't have that many good coaches growing up. My dad was one, so we'll put you in that bucket. But I had not that many good coaches, say, in high school or whatnot.

But you see those scenes in movies where they just get the words because the coach is not after how the kids are feeling. The coach is after the mind. Break it down. Be looking in the right way. And that's what these are. Dead men don't care about the world after they're buried. Paul's saying they're dead and likewise those who are living are concerned with the whereabouts of life.

To the concerns of this world we are as dead men. In our mindsets and our affection we are one hidden with Christ as it says in verse 3. And get this, it actually comes full circle, right?

[25:06] Christ is no longer here. Remember verse 1? He is above seated at the right hand of the Father which oddly enough is where our things are. That's where we're supposed to be looking, right?

So that works out. It doesn't work out. It was established that way. But do you follow the logic? Do you follow the reason behind it? It rings similar to what Paul already stated in chapter 2 verse 12. Buried with him in baptism in which you also were raised with him through faith in the working of God who raised him from the dead. How do we win this battle against the world? In setting our hearts and our minds above?

Because to this world as I said we are as dead men having been granted life thankfully in another. And I think understanding that is key. As I was studying and I've got a couple stories here to end with but has anybody heard of Frank Binford Hull?

Does that name ring a bell? Okay so if I mess this up you guys won't know any different. Okay good. So I found a commentary from this gentleman. He lived quite a while ago but I liked his words from the commentary on these two verses but then I went back and I wanted to know okay who is this guy and did he just get lucky with this or you know did yeah.

[26:20] So I found his life was a testament to the whole topic here. So let me just I'll read through this pretty quickly. Frank was born in the 1800s in London. He went to a very well to do school.

He was considered extremely intellectual. His family was in banking and finance and he was essentially set to just kind of jump right into this very lucrative career as a booming businessman.

When he was a late teenager, older he became a believer and as he wrote in his own journal he calls it he met a stranger from Galilee. I thought that was nice. But essentially shortly after entering his professional career Frank gave up everything and became a full time teacher and evangelist and a publisher.

So from that decision he traveled Western Europe he conducted tent missions he visited rural areas preaching he eventually ended up in South Africa the West Indies essentially all over the world throughout his life.

He became known not as a successful businessman but as a teacher and he was best known for instructing Christians in biblical truth. I discovered in looking at this guy's life one of the books that he had published actually landed in the hands of a young Billy Graham who essentially studied it and recommended it to almost every guy that came behind him in his own ministry.

[27:39] That's the sort of influence this guy had. And to his character and his credit despite his successful publishing business his tenure of teaching and missions it was said that he was entirely careless of human estimation of his work.

I had to think about that sentence for a while. But in other words he was unfazed it just the popularity of his life's engagement didn't even occur to him.

It's just I'm just doing this. I'm just focused elsewhere. You know it was said and then this is the last quote in his life but at his funeral they said that you know of his friends and family the gospel and the truth of the Bible was shared at the time to every corner of the world where English is spoken through his publishing company.

It's amazing. I'm actually shocked I had never heard of this guy. What a testament to living though right? I shared this because again his commentary I thought was very insightful and this is what he says on Colossians 3 3 and 4 the counterpart to our identification with Christ do I have this?

Yeah. The counterpart to our identification I can't get that word right identification with Christ in his death is our identification with him in his resurrection they're unified the effect of the first is to disconnect us from man's world man's religion man's wisdom the effect of the other is to put us in touch with God's world and with all that's there these verses unfold the blessedness into which we are introduced no doubt a gifted teacher right I think if Frank's life I mean it would fall right in line with this text that's why I wanted to share that with you logically if you're dead in this sense you have no reason to care about I have no reason to care about the rudiments of this world the ceremonies of the law the traditions of men the lusts of this planet the pride of life you know everything that comes into play that is wrongfully there and we have all the more reason on the flip side to live our life in light of what's been secured in eternity a couple more verses here and we'll skip down to the end 1 John now we are all sorry now all we did I get that wrong

[30:01] I must have copied that in essentially we're all sons of God and it does not appear what we shall be but we know that when he shall appear we shall be like him for we shall see him as he is Philippians 3 those those whose end is destruction whose God is their belly and whose glory is their shame who set their mind on earthly things for our citizenship is in heaven from which we also eagerly await for the Savior the Lord Christ Jesus who will transform our body that it may be conformed to his glorious body according to the working by which he is able to do to subdue all things to himself so there's our text I know we're running a little bit long let me close with one story I like this story as well I think it will bring this together has anybody heard the story of the old woman in the fork nobody okay I'm two for two so I could be running with it here it's a good story

I think it brings us together so the story goes like this there was an older woman who was diagnosed with a terminal illness there was a medical option but she was a believer she talked to her family they decided not going to take the risky surgery she had lived a full life in the church and she was content with where she was at so she put her will together she tied up a few loose ends and she arranged for the funeral the burial details everything that goes into that and she invited the pastor over one Sunday afternoon for a discussion she just wanted to make sure that they were all on the same page songs that she wanted she described what she wanted to wear at the service what verses read everything from the outfit to the timing everything was in order and as the pastor

was preparing to leave the woman suddenly remembered something important one more thing she said I want to be buried I want you to place a fork in my hand the pastor was a little confused like a dinner fork yeah that's right so the pastor stood there not wanting to question this woman's final wish right the woman continued and explained she said

I've spent a lifetime attending church potlucks wedding banquets Christmas dinners family occasions and there's always that moment after the main dish when the plates are being cleared away and someone leans in and says make sure to keep your fork she continued each and every time those three words always signified there was something wonderful that was about to follow it was either a fantastically prepared pie a gooey butter cake a molten lava dessert that's my favorite by the way but always something amazing to look forward to the pastor smiled so I want a fork in my hand I want people to know at the funeral that the best is yet to come for me and I want them to remember that picture she said I like that story the dying woman knew that her passing days were not her life and I think that's the mindset that Paul's charging in this text here it is again right if then you were raised with

Christ seek those things which are above where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God set your mind affections on things above not on the things of the earth for you died and your life is hidden with Christ when Christ who is our life appears then you will appear with him in glory as musicians come up and we go into the next meeting does that mindset and again it's talking to myself as much as anybody but is that what I'm pursuing is that what I'm chasing is that where I'm fixated do I live as though I'm dead to this world do I seek and do I set my affections on things above where Christ is so as we transition to the next meeting I just encourage you with that think about those things and think about how we were able to even do that through the sacrifice that was given Amen Amen