

Colossians Part 4: Alive In Christ

Week 1: Raised with Christ

Sunday, February 26th 2023

- **TODAY we enter chapter 3 of Colossians! Start with question- what is the GOAL of FAITH? OF COURSE, FAITH is how we believe! Faith is how we move beyond the very constraining limits of this finite and physical world and enter into the realm of the Spirit- Faith is how we know God. The writer of Hebrews begins with this:**

Hebrews 1:1-3 Now faith is confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see. ² This is what the ancients were commended for. ³ By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command... **goes on from there- by faith we believe!**

- **SO as people of FAITH IN GOD, what do we see as-**

‡ **The goal of OUR faith... now, in reality of daily life? What is the purpose of faith in our relationship with God?**

- **Very important question, because –and I realize I'm generalizing here- I will assert there are two big ways we think about faith- and as we look across Christian culture, ONE is much more prevalent than the other.**
- **The first, the more common perspective (if you look at Christian movies, music, books, many sermons...)- is that FAITH is the means by which we move God to action. We may think of what Jesus said in Mark 11...**

Mark 11:22.. "Have faith in God," Jesus answered. Truly I tell you, if anyone says to this mountain, 'Go, throw yourself into the sea,' and does not doubt in their heart but believes that what they say will happen, it will be done for them. Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours.

- **OK- That passage, and others like in in the NT, are highly prone to mis-interpretation. Extremely important context that has to be taken into account- for example, immediately following this Jesus said...**

²⁵ And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins."

- **So, would we say that God's forgiveness of our sin is contingent- or in correlation- to the extent we forgive other's sin? Or is there again important context, deeper meaning Jesus is pointing to, we must understand in light of the rest of the NT's teaching about forgiveness?**
- **YES! (Demonstrates why it is NOT helpful to say things like "Bible said it, I believe it, that settles it" Because what Bible says about something may be quite different from what it seems to say in one specific passage).**
- **SO, back to faith- while most people don't see God as a candy machine- 'if I just believe enough God will give me that new truck'- it IS VERY COMMON for us to think that God's provision is somehow contingent upon the level of our faith.**
- **NOT TALKING ABOUT when we sincerely say- "God, I don't have control here- I have influence, but not control, and I'm trusting you with the outcome..." That is deep water faith, and it is a powerful source of peace. BUT WHAT WE SO OFTEN HEAR is the idea that by our faith we can move God to manage or change the outcome in a way according to our prayer.**

- **AND THEN, if God doesn't 'come through' in the needs or desires we bring before him, perhaps it's because we DID waiver in our faith, or had insufficient faith, or didn't pray enough, or there weren't enough people praying, or we didn't do it right.**
- **Then we turn on our Christian radio station, or perhaps go to a prayer service, and we hear someone testify to how they prayed for a specific need, specific circumstance, THEY HAD FAITH- and God DID come through, he DID meet the need, he DID heal their child- so GOD IS GOOD, and WE ARE BLESSED.**
- **And my friends, the innumerable people who are caught in chronic struggle, who instead lost their child, who have experienced years of affliction- they hear this and it is crushing. OH TO BE one of the privileged few who are truly blessed by GOD- because it ISN'T ME!**
- **Church- In my experience as a pastor, when this is where we are, when GOD DOESN'T COME THROUGH in response to our faith- as we are constantly taught that he will- there are two general responses**
- **One is to blame God. We get angry. We are confused and disillusioned- God doesn't hear me. God doesn't care. God is arbitrary, because he answered another's prayer but ignored mine. God must not be good.**
- **OR, if our faith doesn't allow us to place the blame on God, we place the blame on ourselves. We weren't good enough. We lacked faith. James says 'the prayer of a righteous person 'availeth much.'... so I must not be righteous enough for God to respond. Maybe if I had used anointing oil when we prayed God would have heard. THIS leads to bondage, spiritual despair, and when people are told as much by preachers/teachers or even well meaning friends, it is tantamount to spiritual abuse.**
- **In response we come up with all sorts of theological reasons to explain why God answers some prayers and not others- why God is moved by some people's faith but not others- why God has blessed some much more than others. These explanations are called 'Theodicies' – and they've been debated for history of the church.**
- **But in the midst of great crisis, all those explanations- all our doctrinal formulas come crashing down as so many are left with only the question... WHAT DOES FAITH DO? I DON'T UNDERSTAND. And friends- THIS HAPPENS ALL THE TIME.**
- **BUT WHAT IF FAITH isn't primarily about moving God to act in a certain way? WHAT IF Faith isn't about what we want God TO DO, but IN THE MIDST OF LIFE AS IT REALLY IS- Faith is about us understanding, believing, and experiencing the goodness OF WHAT GOD HAS ALREADY DONE?**
- **THIS is the great hope I've struggled to teach over these past twenty years. It is the hope of our UNION with Christ, our identity in Christ, the reality of WHO WE ARE and what is now TRUE OF US in Christ, and what it looks like for the nature and character of Christ to increasingly become the nature and character of YOU AND ME- HOW WE LIVE- because Christ is in us, we are IN CHRIST, and HIS LIFE is now OUR LIFE.**
- **One of my favorite statements of this truth- that I've shared multiple times in the past- is from a self-published commentary on Romans 5-8 (Here's Life!) by the pastor of an inner-city church in Oak Cliff Texas- the now passed away David Kuykendall**

There are things that are *true of us* In Christ
 That we will not *experience* as truth (as our reality)
 Until we *believe* they are true

And *choose* to live in the good of that truth

- ***THIS is the understanding of faith- THIS IS THE LENS Paul gives to us in Colossians- as he cries out- LOOK! HEAR! SEE WHAT GOD HAS DONE THROUGH CHRIST, and how it has SET YOU FREE from the old way of religious law and legalism, and BROUGHT YOU INTO an entirely new way of living, with an entirely new SOURCE OF LIFE.***
- ***Over the past two Sunday's we've heard Paul proclaim- You DIED WITH CHRIST ... AND NOW, as we enter chapter three, Paul exclaims... YOU HAVE BEEN..***

✠ Raised with Christ

Colossians 3:1-4 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. ³ For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

- ***Friends- this is profound- but at least on first read it can sound somewhat abstract. I'm raised? I don't feel raised! What does this even mean?***
- ***Here's the deal- what Paul says here is actually quite simple and straightforward... it's incredibly practical, and it's a perspective of FAITH. So, lets walk through it.***

Colossians 3:1a

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

- ***We tend to think of 'resurrection'- not Jesus', but ours, as a future event. Something that will happen when Christ returns- we read 1 Thessalonians 4 where Paul says – when Christ returns, 'the dead in Christ will be raised first'.***
- ***But here, Paul says that the believer has ALREADY been raised with Christ. Not only that, in a parallel passage in Ephesians 2, we are told that...***

Ephesians 2:6 *And God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus,*

- ***We say, "One day I'll go to heaven when I die"... God says... no, you're already here! I see you right there- three rows back, second seat on the left...***
- ***So what does this mean? MANY IMPLICATIONS... but***
- ***Simply put... God's work to redeem us, to forgive us, make us his own, and make us NEW, HOLY, and DEARLY LOVE... this work is COMPLETE. In our spirit, who we truly are, we are the righteousness of Christ, we are in Union with Christ, and NOTHING will ever separate us from God's love.***
- ***SO, we don't have to stress, and get caught up in all sorts of legalistic activity thinking that God's acceptance, presence, and goodness to us is based upon our religious performance or deservedness.***
- ***Because this is true- because we are with Christ- and Christ is with us/ in us- this means there is NEVER a moment of life- no matter how challenging, exhausting, or confusing life may be- NEVER a moment when we are separated from the presence, the acceptance, and the power of Christ's nature within us.***
- ***In all sincerity we may say "Lord, you are here with me in this circumstance, so please change it."***

- **The Holy Spirit- working in union with our spirit- gently redirects us, saying... “Child- your hope, and my purpose for you- is not contingent on what happens in this part of your story- rather, I am here so that RIGHT NOW, as you DEAL WITH and seek to INFLUENCE what’s going on in your story, you will do so with my..**
- **Strength, patience, courage.... You will express my kindness, compassion, acceptance, and love... and you will experience my HOPE, PEACE, and even my JOY.**
- **CHURCH- because we have been RAISED WITH CHRIST- BY FAITH we can rest in the great hope of Jesus’ last words before his ascension that we see in Matthew... “BEHOLD, I AM.. WITH YOU ALWAYS.. to the very end of the age.”**
- **Throughout the NT we hear the writers telling us- THIS IS OUR TRUTH! THIS IS WHO WE ARE- and TO EXPERIENCE the power and goodness of this truth is a matter of...**

✠ Setting and fixing

- **Paul exhorts us... SET YOUR HEART, YOUR MIND, FIX YOUR EYES, on the good of this truth.**

Colossians 3:1-2 *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.*

- **We see this principle in multiple places...**

2 Cor 4:18 *So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.*

Hebrews 12:1-3 *Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, ² fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

- **In Col 3:1-2 we read “set your HEART on things above”, and also “set your MIND on things above.” This is subtle but Paul is describing ALL OF WHO WE ARE. In our heart- our deepest seat of our convictions, our values, how we FEEL ABOUT THINGS- our GUT... believe that Christ is with you, at work in you and through you- be CONSCIOUSLY SURRENDERED to the nature and character of Christ.**
- **And in your MIND- how you think, what you think about things, your reasoning, your worldview, how you deal with your biases, your self-awareness of what your mind is up to... BELIEVE that Christ is with you, at work in you and through you- be CONSCIOUSLY SURRENDERED to the nature and character of Christ.**
- **In all of who we are- how we think, feel, and act- in your mind, will, and emotions- choose to place Christ, his nature and purposes- at our center. Choose for the hope and goodness of Jesus to be the lens through which we see and engage with our world.**
- **So here’s question. In the midst of your story, what this week may hold- what does it look like for you to ‘set your mind, set your heart’ on Christ- on things above, the truth of the goodness of God? This is a choice of faith, and it doesn’t happen by accident!**
- **NOW, to drive his point home, Paul reminds us WHY we are free to make that choice- to set our mind upon Christ- because the OLD PERSON WE USED TO BE- who didn’t have the ability to make that choice- that person DIED.**

† **You died!**

Colossians 3:3a *For you died...*

- **Okay... Let's remind us what this means**
- **Just like the truth that we've been raised with Christ, we see throughout the NT the freedom that we DIED with CHRIST. Galatians 2:20 proclaims this. In RO 6...**

Romans 6:5-8 *For if we have been united with him in a death like his, we will certainly also be united with him in a resurrection like his. ⁶ For we know that our old self was crucified with him so that the body ruled by sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves to sin— ⁷ because anyone who has died has been set free from sin. ⁸ Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him.*

- **A few weeks ago we talked about the concept of our 'FLESH'... this is the human condition- the strategy of life rooted in SELF- that is our only option of living apart from Christ. This is who we WERE. AND when scripture says we DIED WITH CHRIST, it means that old version of us helplessly addicted and bound to self and the weakness of the human condition- that person was killed- stripped of their power to define us.**
- **Remember what we talked about next? ZOMBIE THEOLOGY- the remnant of that old person- like a zombie, continually follows up around trying to convince us they are still who we are.**
- **And so here Paul reminds us- YOU DIED! So when you hear the lying voice of your old self trying to deceive you, remember- YOU'VE BEEN RAISED- your truth is the hope, the goodness, and the character of Jesus.**
- **So when I hear my brain or emotions saying- "I'm so angry! I'm bitter! I'm defeated... I'm worthless... I can say- NO! That's not who I am! That part of me is DEAD, no matter how real it feels right now in this moment- for I am choosing to set my mind upon what CHRIST SAYS IS TRUE OF ME.**
- **Because CHRIST'S truth right now may not change the external details of my circumstance, but internally He is a bringer of peace, trust, value, forgiveness, kindness... He brings the part of His nature I most need right now in the midst of my situation.**
- **And now in verse 3 Paul says something really interesting: "For you died, and your life is now..."**

† **Hidden..** *with Christ in God.*

- **Our life is HIDDEN with Christ.**
- **If you've ever looked into purchasing camouflaged clothing for hunting... you've probably seen this image- it's just a picture of some trees and bushes.. but if you look really close, after a moment, you see there is a hunter- hidden right there in plain sight. You didn't see the hunter because they were indistinguishable from their surrounding.**
- **Friends, when we are living in the good of our union with Christ, our lives will look so much like Jesus that you wouldn't be able to tell us apart. We are HIDDEN IN HIM, or better put, Christ is HIDDEN IN US. For this is where Paul goes next...**

Colossians 3:4 *When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

- **In one way, when our lives express the goodness, nature, and love of Christ, this WILL be noticed. This will distinguish us from the surrounding brokenness of our world.**
- **This is why Peter said... 'be ready to give an answer when people ask about the reason for your hope!' Hope that flows from Christ is not the norm, and it will be seen!**

- **But from another perspective- a freeing and peace-bringing perspective- we don't have to FORCE THIS! The false teachers in Colossae were pushing a kind of religion that focused on external glory- "look at me, look at how religious I am, how spiritual I am.. look at the glory of ME"**
- **Paul responds... no- disciple- hidden within you a hope, a certainty, and a source of life that is invisible to the world. It is humble. It doesn't seek recognition. It simply lives, quietly, lovingly, and honestly displaying its authentic transforming power through your daily life.**
- **ONE DAY, when Christ returns and appears in all His Glory- THEN, on that day, the Glory residing in you will also be fully revealed.**
- **But UNTIL THEN remember- BY FAITH set your heart and your mind on the miraculous truth that you HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH CHRIST, and HIS IS YOUR LIFE, to bring you REAL LIFE- the LIFE OF GOD, in the midst of life as it really is.**

† Real life

- **End with this. Isaiah 40 is a beautiful example of God's presence and provision to the people of Israel- in the midst of their own rebellion and suffering- pointing toward what God would accomplish and make possible through Jesus Christ.**
- **If you read the entire chapter you will hear the prophet comforting Israel in her distress, saying- Don't you realize who God is? Have you no concept of God's sovereignty, his power, and how small you are next to him, like a grasshopper on the earth... BUT THEN Isaiah proclaims... AND THIS GOD OF POWER- THE GOD OF THE UNIVERSE, His desire is to give HIS LIFE, TO YOU.**

Isaiah 40:27-31

Why do you complain, Jacob? Why do you say, Israel,
 "My way is hidden from the LORD;
 my cause is disregarded by my God"?
 Do you not know? Have you not heard?
 The LORD is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth.
 He will not grow tired or weary,
 and his understanding no one can fathom.
 He gives strength to the weary and increases the power of the weak.
 Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall;
 but those who hope in the LORD
 will renew **(exchange)** their strength.

They will soar on wings like eagles;
 they will run and not grow weary,
 they will walk and not be faint.

- **Listen to that last refrain. Here God reveals the power of his presence in the fullness of life's experience.**
- **Because of the life and goodness of GOD- IN US...**
- **There will be times when we experience the heights of the goodness of life, and appreciate the majesty of God from a perspective like only an eagle could have soaring in flight. There are times life can be like this.**

- **ALSO, there are times when life is on the run. Like a marathon, unceasing- the issues and work keeps coming and just doesn't stop. And yet, in the midst of the ongoing nature of life, we won't grow weary.**
- **AND THEN, there are times that all we can do is just walk. One step at a time, getting through this moment, this struggle, and then all we can do is take the next step. These are the times of life we are tempted to give up. To just collapse. AND YET, even in these times of life, we WILL NOT FAINT.**
- **WHY? Not because our faith convinces God to change the nature of our circumstance.**
- **BUT BECAUSE THE LIFE OF GOD WITHIN US changes OUR NATURE within our circumstance.**
- **BELIEVER. YOU DIED with Christ, and the old has gone. YOU HAVE BEEN RAISED WITH CHRIST, and your new life has come. This new life in a sense is hidden, the world cannot see it, although many times they will notice the result of it. And so we live, humbly, thankfully, being transformed by our FAITH in CHRIST, who is our life.**
- **Do we believe it? May it be said of us.**