

# Colossians 3:1-4

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[ 0 : 00 ] And we'll look at the first four verses of Colossians 3 if you have a Bible with you. There's a story that goes of two captives trapped in towers and their only connection to the outside world was a small window in their prison cell.

As the years went by the two prisoners changed gradually but in very very different ways. One prisoner became more and more depressed, more and more sad.

But the other kept cheerful and hopeful. What was the difference between them? Both of them would spend each night in their cell and at their window.

The first prisoner would look down beneath him at the mud below and he would contemplate his prison. He would think about his chains and groan.

He'd relive his captivity. But the second prisoner spent the night at his window gazing up at the stars, dreaming of a life to come.

[ 1 : 07 ] By the time the captivity was over, the first prisoner had simply died of hopelessness. But the second prisoner was ready for freedom.

The moral of the story is that when you're locked in, look up. Look up to the stars. Dream of a life that is to come.

And that is actually what Paul tells us to do in our passage tonight, isn't it? Paul writes Colossians literally from prison. He's locked up behind four walls in Rome.

He's isolated. But see where he wants us to look with him. Look at verse one. Seek the things that are above.

And again, verse two. Set your minds on things that are above. If Paul had a window, and I doubt he did. He's locked in, but he is looking up.

[ 2 : 09 ] He is setting his mind and seeking with his heart things above. And that's always been the case, hasn't it? Not just since March the 23rd. It's always been the direction of the Christian gaze.

Saints on earth look upwards to heaven. You don't need a telescope to do that, do you? He's not literally saying you need to look at the sky every night.

You don't need a rooftop garden. You don't need any garden at all. You can do it when you're in a Roman prison. You can do it when you're locked in a West London living room. It makes no difference.

We are to gaze beyond the visible. Verse one. To things above where Christ is. We are to see things we can't see.

We're to look up to things that we can't look at physically. Not yet. To desire things that are above this world.

[ 3 : 15 ] And this reality where Christ is. In case we don't get it, Paul puts it in the negative as well, doesn't he? In verse two, he says, set your minds not on things that are on earth, but on things above where Christ is.

On our street, Cumberland Road. We're part of a WhatsApp group on our street, which is amazing. It does an awful lot of good. It's really lovely. Someone wrote on there a few weeks ago.

Just imagine when all this is over. Imagine hugging each other. Imagine saying, pop the kettle on. I'm coming over. Imagine seeing your family face to face.

Imagine a pint down the pub. Imagine a Mackie D's drive through. Imagine the cinema or food in town or street parties. Imagine. And they ended it with this line.

If there's anything to get us through, it's imagining how we'll feel when it's all over. And I read that and it's kind of inspiring. And I realized at the moment, our nation believes in a kind of street gospel, doesn't it?

[ 4 : 26 ] It's a kind of message that we are believing and telling each other that requires a kind of faith. There's a kind of longing that we all share right now for release.

For a fuller life that we know we're made for. And it requires a certain amount of faith, doesn't it? To keep thinking of what we can't see yet. And we say a hearty amen to messages like that.

It is a kind of faith in looking for the life that we're supposed to have. And yet that's just the human gospel, isn't it?

Because the real gospel that God gives calls us to gaze much, much higher. Not just the things on earth where we're all looking forward to getting things back soon.

If you wonder what you're really seeking and what you're really setting your minds upon at the moment. A good question is to ask.

[ 5 : 30 ] If this lockdown was never to end, heaven forbid. What have you got most to look forward to? If this should go on forever and ever, have you still got anything to look forward to?

Because lockdown or not, the Christian gaze is still in the same direction as it always has been. To things far, far above. So that is the command that Paul gives in this passage.

To seek and desire and to long for and to fill our minds with the things of heaven where Christ is.

But what I want us to think about is why we are to do that tonight.

Why should we be allowed as earthlings to dream of the above? When Paul says it's about whose resurrection we celebrate at Easter time, actually.

Who has been raised to this place we are trying to seek? Who belongs in this place? Who is allowed to seek it and set their minds on it as if they belong to it?

[ 6 : 43 ] Who on earth down here, lockdown on this earth, could possibly think of themselves up there in the place where Christ is? Now, I've got to be honest with you.

This sermon is being preached a week late in human time. But actually, the Lord knows, doesn't he? And actually, every Sunday is Easter Sunday, isn't it, really?

It's why the church began worshipping on a Sunday and moved on to the day of Christ's resurrection. Every Sunday is Easter Resurrection Sunday.

So every Sunday, whose resurrection are we celebrating? Just over 2000 years ago, Jesus Christ was killed on a cross.

He died, was buried and he rose from the dead. But what is really odd about our passage tonight is that on Jesus's cross and in his tomb and in the garden of new life, his was not the only death, burial and resurrection.

[ 7 : 53 ] Three times in our passage and elsewhere in the letter to the Colossians, Paul uses the words with Christ. First, he describes Jesus's Easter passion with words like raised and died and appearing in glory in our verses tonight.

And we think automatically of Jesus, don't we? Of course we do. That's right. But each time, did you notice, Paul tacks on the words with Christ.

Did you see verse two of chapter two, actually, a bit earlier? Oh, sorry, of chapter three. You have died and your life is hidden with Christ.

Chapter three, verse two. Earlier in the letter, he says that we have been buried with him in baptism. Chapter two, verse 12. And then back to our passage, chapter three, verse one.

We have been raised with him. And verse four, we will appear with him in glory. You see, Paul, he thinks about Easter, doesn't he?

[ 8 : 57 ] And no sooner does he think of Jesus, he thinks of some other people with Jesus, too. He thinks not just of one man, but of the many he represents, his people.

That first Good Friday, Jesus died alone, well and truly. But his was not the only death. That first Easter Sunday, he is risen alone.

But his is not the only resurrection. Paul says that when he died, we died. When he was buried, we were.

We died. We were buried. And when he rose, we were raised with him. And when he will appear, we will appear with him. You with him.

And I really want to impress this upon you this evening. The resurrection of Jesus is not just the pledge of things to come later, although it is that. It is the promise and the guarantee of things already started for Jesus's people.

[ 10 : 08 ] It is the power of things already happened and happening for us. The Heidelberg Catechism says that one of the benefits of Christ's resurrection is that by his power, we, too, are

already now resurrected to a new life.

So set your minds and seek that life you already have with Christ. Let your mind and your desires catch up with who you really are with Christ.

Now, in the rest of the time that we've got, I want to spend a few brief moments thinking about the three with Christ's in the first few verses of chapter three. The first is in verse one.

He says, if then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above. So, first of all, we are raised with Christ. That's what Paul says. As we work out what to seek and what to set our minds on, we've got to ask, well, where are we?

What are we to look at? What is our situation? What is our locality? I can see most of you are sat in your living rooms right now on very comfy sofas.

[ 11 : 28 ] So it sounds like a stupid question, doesn't it? But Paul tells us here something very, very strange. It's really odd, isn't it? The location of your life, he says, your situation is not here on earth.

It is raised with Christ. You have been raised with him. Paul here is explaining, isn't he?

He's unpacking what we in the church call union with Christ. And it's all over the Bible, actually, where Christ's actions have an effect on all of his people.

The Old Testament kind of teaches how this works, where we see one person, a representative, affect the many. It could be a head of a household or a king or a priest.

One person who has a particular role in affecting the many. So wherever the king goes, the people go to. Whatever the priest does, atoning for sin, the people receive to.

[ 12 : 34 ] It's one for all and it's all for one. And so in Adam, he was the first head representative of the whole human race. And all of us fell in Adam.

But in Jesus, the second Adam, his people are made righteous. It's what Paul says in Romans 5. By the one man's disobedience, the many were made to be sinners.

But by the one man's obedience, Jesus, the many will be made to made righteous. And so for his people, Jesus is the head.

He's the priest. He's the king whose actions affect all of his people. Wherever he goes, we go to. Whatever he does, we do to.

And so when he is raised, we are raised with him. I downloaded the NASA app the other day. It's mad what you get into, isn't it, during this time.

[ 13 : 35 ] And on the NASA app, you can watch space shuttles launch into the stratosphere. It's kind of cool. Imagine the astronauts. What do they do the night before they take off, maybe on their debut flight?

And they think to themselves, don't they? I was born for this moment. To head on up into space. I can't wait. So what do they do? Do they simply study the spacecraft and learn how it works?

Well, it's a good thing to do, isn't it? But it's not enough. Do they find out the route that the shuttle is going to fly on? Well, that is also good to know.

But it's not enough. Once it's launched, do they try and follow it into the sky on their own? Of course they don't. The first thing they have to do, obviously, is to get on board.

They have to get into the shuttle. They have to be with the shuttle to get anywhere, don't they?

Because wherever the shuttle goes, they go too when they're inside it.

[ 14 : 46 ] Do they follow the shuttle's example to get off the ground? No, they can't do that unless they are in the shuttle and with the shuttle.

They can't launch themselves and achieve orbit. But they are affected by the work of the fuel cells. That's a really awful picture, isn't it?

But in the same way, so as Jesus is raised from the dead, his people are raised with him. He blasts off from the grave.

And his people are in him. Where he goes, they go too. Sure, we have to know him. And we have to study him.

Don't we? We have to follow his example. The Bible tells us that. We have to learn the Christian life. But first, before we do any of those things, we have to be with him.

[ 15 : 42 ] And in him, we have to trust in him and run to him. To be in him by faith. So those who do that, Paul says, are raised. In Paul's way of thinking, that this being raised is not just about coming back from the dead.

It's not just about getting a heart that never stops beating. It's not just about becoming immortal. Jesus is raised from the dead.

Yes. And he is immortal. But he is also raised to glory and given a glorious body. At his resurrection, Jesus breaks the barrier of this world and goes into another. Jesus is transferred from the atmosphere of this world with its death and its weakness and its limitation. And he thunders into another world altogether. Into another plane of existence. Into another reality. Paul uses really big world words to describe this in Colossians.

[16:56] Earlier, he speaks of Christians and he says, chapter 1, verse 13, that we have been delivered from the domain of darkness. And we've been transferred to the kingdom of God's beloved son.

Being raised with Christ is a realm shift. It is to have been transferred from one domain into another. From one kingdom into another.

From one country into another. From one atmosphere of reality altogether. To be transferred into glory. So we're to seek the better place above.

You know, when Jesus was raised from the tomb. Once he was raised, he had very little interest in that tomb. The gospel writers never mention, do they, what he kind of did in the tomb after he was raised.

Because he didn't spend any time there. He didn't think to himself, you know, this is quite a nice tomb, actually. It's a rich man's tomb. I was the first one in it.

[18:06] It belongs to me. I feel a certain nostalgia about this tomb. I kind of built up a bit of a connection with it, actually. I think I'll spend a bit more time here.

Before I go to the father. I'll do it up a bit. I'll paint it. I'll get some trinkets. Sort out the lighting. Make it nice and comfortable.

I'll get a few tomb comforts. As soon as Jesus is raised, his place is now with the father at his right hand.

And he is transferred into glory. And there is no going back. Why on earth would he want to? And Paul is saying that that transfer has happened to us.

So to set our minds on things on earth, to seek things on earth, is like trying to deck out a used and finished with tomb. It is putting trinkets on an empty tomb that we used to belong to.

[19:08] And God gives us good things in this world. Don't get me wrong. But not to make us more comfortable in this world. But to keep us going for the next world.

William Gunnell, a theologian and pastor, he said that temporal good things. The earth is not the Christian's freight. Bear with this.

But his ballast. And therefore are to be desired to poise, not load the vessel. Now, I had to work out what on earth all that language was.

It's really helpful. He's saying, in other words, we are on our way to a new world and a new reality as if we're on a ship. And the ship has been launched.

And we're on board. And anything that we have with us on the journey is only good insofar as it supports us on the journey.

[20:06] It's our ballast. That's what a ballast does. It keeps an even keel. It's our strength for the journey. God gives us good things in this life.

To direct us, to encourage us and to poise us for the next life. Not to load us back down to earth. Because we have been raised with Christ. Nothing is normal at the moment, is it? Normality is suspended.

But in this time, we should think very carefully about which parts of normality we really want to rush back to. Which parts of normality that we've had to leave behind for a while should actually we be thinking, let's just chuck this overboard.

Because they've become the freight of our lives rather than the ballast poisoning us to heaven. Now, the only problem with all of this is, isn't it?

[21:16] It's all sounding great. But why don't I experience this yet? Why can't I see this yet? Why don't I feel myself skyrocket into this new creation, this new kingdom with Christ, raised with him?

Well, we are raised with Christ. And more briefly, the second two points. This is because our life is hidden with Christ. That's why we're not feeling it so much yet.

Verse 3, did you see that the next thing he says, your life is hidden with Christ in God. We're very, very aware that we're all stuck in our houses at the moment.

We're stuck here on earth. And we've always been aware of that. We are still very much living in a weak world. We're not filled with bodies that die, not glorified, raised bodies.

We're part of this world. Yet to launch above fully. And that's not because this resurrection hasn't already happened in one sense.

[ 22 : 19 ] It's because the new life we have with Christ is hidden. It's obscured with Christ in God. It's not been revealed in its fullness yet.

And just think about that phrase for a moment. Your life hidden with Christ in God. Paul's trying to articulate something that is just very difficult, isn't it?

In some way that is beyond our understanding. The source of our life is not here. It's not even in our bodies.

The fundamental source of my life is not my beating heart. It's not my organs. It's not my food. It's not my money. It's not my comfort. All life, both physical and spiritual, is not in any of these things fundamentally.

[ 23 : 21 ] Not in things on earth. Paul says. Life is hidden with Christ in God.

True life is not reliant on the things of this world. Now again, of course, God provides abundant things for life in the world, doesn't he?

But life is not just having a beating heart or working lungs. Life is not in anything that we do or have. In health or in sickness. In want or in plenty. The Christian life is with Christ in God. He puts it very strongly in verse 4.

Paul even goes so far as to say Christ is your life. Your life support is Christ.

[ 24 : 21 ] You are ventilated by the Holy Spirit. Life hidden with Christ. A life that continues after your last breath.

And after your body dies. Your life is not in the things that you do. Or your job. Or your employment. Or anything in this world. Because you have died to this world.

And ultimately you don't live off of it. This world is not your freight. It is your ballast. You have been raised.

So lastly, we come to the day when all will be revealed. It's hidden now, isn't it? But one day this will be revealed. When what is hidden now will appear.

Verse 4. When Christ, who is your life, appears. You will appear with him in glory. Raised with him. Hidden with him. And thirdly and lastly, to appear with him.

[ 25 : 20 ] There will come a day when our senses will catch up to the reality. And our bodies will catch up to the reality. Of who we are with Christ. Because with Christ, wherever he goes, we go too, isn't it?

And when Christ appears, we'll appear with him in glory. You can't have one without the other. And notice the when, not the if. It's not if Christ appears.

But when. And that is to make clear and visible what has always been true about those who trust in Jesus. That when he appears on the stage of the universe.

When all the spotlights are on him. And the universe watches. His people will cry out. That there is our life. That's him. He is the story of our lives.

He is the prime of our lives. He is the way and the truth and the life. Richard Baxter famously said that he liked to preach.

[ 26 : 24 ] As never sure to preach again. And a dying man to dying men. It's a really great quote, isn't it? But, you know, on this occasion, the Apostle Paul might say.

Actually, I preach to you from a prison cell. As a raised and living man. To raised and living people. Lives raised and living with Christ.

The trivialities and frivolities of normal life in this world. They're not always bad, are they? But when normal life returns. Ask yourself which parts of normality are really worth running back to.

Thomas Brooks said that where 1,000 are destroyed by the world's frowns. 10,000 are destroyed by the world's smiles. The world, siren-like, sings to us and sinks us.

The world and our flesh and the devil. They want to sink us, don't they? But with Christ, those who trust in him, there is this unstoppable, gravitational pull towards him where he is.

[ 27 : 40 ] Because where he goes, we go to. Raised, hidden and about to appear in glory. And so people of God's, people with Christ, remember the moral of the story.

When you're locked in, locked into life in this world, look up. Look up to a glory to come.

Should we pray together? Let's pray. Let's pray.