Colossians 3:1-4
“Set Your Mind on Things Above”
Sermon

1.

Introduction

1.

John Bunyan tells a story about “a man with a muck-rake” (who doesn’t seek the crown hanging above his head)

1.

The character named the Interpreter shows a woman named Christiana “a room where was a man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand. There stood also one over his head with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered to give him that crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and the dust of the floor.”

2.

“...his Muck-rake doth shew his carnal mind. And whereas thou seest him rather give heed to rake up straws and sticks and the dust of the floor, than to what he says that calls to him from above with the Coelestial Crown in his hand, it is to shew that Heaven is but as a fable to some, and that things here are counted the only things substantial. Now whereas it was also shewed thee that the man could look no way but downwards, it is to let thee know that earthly things when they are with power upon men’s minds, quite carry their hearts away from God.”

3.
“Chris. Then said Christiana, O deliver me from this Muck-rake.”

4.

“Inter. That prayer, said the Interpreter, has lain by till ‘tis almost rusty. Give me not Riches, is scarcely the prayer of one of ten thousand. Straws and sticks and dust with most are the great things now looked after.”

5.

“Straws and sticks and dust with most are the great things now looked after.” What do you “look after” in your life? What are the “great things” in your life? In this passage Paul exhorts you to “Set your mind on things above, not on things that are on earth.”

6.

**Sermon Outline.** We will consider this exhortation under the following three headings:

1. Seek the things that are above 1

2. Set your mind on things above 2

3. Because Christ is your life 3-4
Body

Seek the things that are above

First Paul exhorts us in v. 1 to seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

Ground: Union with Christ

Paul grounds his exhortations throughout this passage in the fact of your union with Christ.
“Since then you have been raised with Christ”

Paul is building on what he has already taught us in 2:12-13, that you were buried with Christ in baptism, and raised with Him through faith. At the center of your union with Christ is the fact that you are united with Him in His death and resurrection. In 2:20 Paul said “with Christ you died to the basic principles of the world.” Through Christ’s death you died to the powers of this dark world. “Sin shall no longer be your master.” (Rom. 6:14) Now in 3:1 Paul expresses the complementary truth that with Christ not only have you
died
to sin, but also you have been
raised
to life with Christ. Christ is your representative who died in your place, and produced your new life in His resurrection, and it is He who is now the source of your spiritual life. When you first come to believe on Him as your Savior, He works a radical change within you—He convicts you of your sin and grants you the gift of repentance unto life so that you turn away from your sin to Him as your Savior. At your conversion the benefits of Christ’s death and resurrection are applied to you, so that you died, and now you have been raised with Christ to newness of life.

Exhortation: Seek the things that are above 1b

1. Have you been “raised with Christ?” Has Christ worked this radical change in you? Has He made you one who now hates your sin, and desires to live a godly life in Christ Jesus? Then why do you turn away from godliness and throw yourself again into sin? Oh, I know it catches you unaware at times, I know it’s
often true it was someone else who provoked you to anger, spite, jealousy, or malice, but in the end these are empty excuses to cover over the shameful reality of your guilt. Are you one whom God has granted conviction of sin and godly repentance? Then admit your sin, and seek Christ your Savior. “If...you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.

2.

Why have you turned away from godliness and stubbornly participated in sin this past week? Paul tells you why. It is because you did not “seek the things that are above.

3.

There is certainly a rebuke implicit in Paul’s words here. But the greater part of Paul’s point is a strong encouragement to grow as Christians. It is the encouragement Paul makes
explicit elsewhere, as he says in Romans 2:7:

- Romans 2:7 to those who by patience in well-doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, he will give eternal life.

Location: Heaven 1c

1.
Paul says the things we should seek are “above.” Where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God

Heaven. In Ephesians 1:20 Paul
makes clear that this location is heaven. He says the Father

Ephesians 1:20 raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly places

Christ. At the center of our
focus should be Christ. The things above are “where Christ is.” Our pursuit should be to gain more of the things that are found where our Savior is.

“Turn your eyes upon Jesus; Look full in His wonderful face. And the things of earth will grow strangely dim In the light of His glory
and grace.”

- Exaltation.

Paul points us not to seek Christ on the cross, or Christ risen from the grave but still on the earth. Paul points us to seek Christ in heaven, Christ
in His exaltation. Christ our Savior is now in a position of glory and honor and power. He sits at the right hand of God the Father, which means He sits in the seat of a king, as the one who rules with all the power of the almighty God. In that position He is the central object of all worship in heaven and on earth, and by His intercession He presents us in God’s presence, prays for us, and makes us acceptable in God’s sight. He has gone ahead of us to prepare a place for us, and
from that place even now Christ is our source of peace with God and life through His name. From there He will come again to judge the living and the dead.

He is the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, and He now holds before you the heavenly crown of life. Do you see it? Or do you only see the straws and sticks and dust of the things of this world?
Set your mind on the things above 2

1. If you know that your vision is too often set on the things of this
world, you need to “set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.” What are those “things that are above?”

2. Distinction. This exhortation in v. 2 to “set your minds on” is different from the exhortation in
v. 1
to “seek” the things that are above. To set your mind on things above involves setting your affections, your desires, on them. It indicates an inner disposition, rather than a practical pursuit. But it also requires that you have an intellectual knowledge of what those things are on which you are to set your mind. For this
reason Paul introduces a distinction to make more clear what he means. He distinguishes the “things above” from the “things that are on earth.”

1.

The things above he has already implied are things in heaven, because...
where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

2. But now he distinguishes the things above from “things that are on earth.”

3.
Location: Heaven vs. Earth. What differentiates these two sets of “things” is their location, and their locations indicate the nature of the “things” in view. The one set is in heaven, the other is on earth.
4. Christ and God. Certainly Paul directs us to set our minds on Christ and on God, both of whom are in heaven, according to v. 1.
5.

Salvation --- blessings, moral purity. But there are other things we should be concerned about as well, indicated by the difference between heaven and earth. Jesus distinguishes heaven and earth in this way:
Matthew 6:19-20

19 “Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, 20 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth

nor rust destroys and
where thieves do not break
in and steal.

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The things in heaven
decay and can be taken
away, the things in
heaven do not decay and
cannot be taken away.
These treasures in heaven have the ring of the blessings of salvation, of eternal life in all of its aspects. In Col. 3:5, Paul tells us to put to death the things that are “earthly” in us and specifies them as a list of
sins, and contrasts them in vv. 12ff with a list of Christian virtues. In Romans 8:5-6 Paul uses a figure of speech that parallels v. 2:

Romans 8:5-6 5 For those who live
according to the flesh
set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit
set their minds on the things of the Spirit.

6 To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind
on the Spirit is life and peace.
By tying these threads together we can see that the things associated with God in heaven are morally pure, and the things associated with earth are morally evil.
In Romans 8 Paul says the flesh brings weakness, hostility, sin, fear, slavery, condemnation, death, and decay, and the Spirit brings life, righteousness, adoption,
freedom, peace, submission, and glorification.

Summary. We can summarize that the things on which we
should set our minds on God, eternal life, salvation blessings, Christian virtues, and anything that is morally pure. Paul exhorts you to focus on these things, as he also says in
Philippians 4:8
Philippians 4:8  Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure
, whatever is lovely,
, whatever is commendable,
, if there is any excellence,
, if there is anything worthy of praise,
think about these things.
Interrelation.

1.
Now does this mean that we should despise all earthly things? Matthew Henry says it does. Commentators John Eadie and Alexander Maclaren say we should not despise earthly things, but should consider them means to God’s
ends, and so of subordinate importance. Eadie says,

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“The pilgrim is not to despise the comforts he may meet with by the
way, but he is not to tarry among them, or leave them with regret.”  

I want to agree with
Eadie’s view, but what view does scripture require us to take?
The deciding principle is this: we must be thankful for God’s good creation, and despise its sinful perversion. And certainly God’s creation can be used in the service of
pursuing the things above. “For everything created by God is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving.” (1 Timothy 4:4)

But a key perversion
you should flee with all your might is the desire to gain an earthly blessing when God offers a heavenly blessing that is far better. This is the true devotion that God
desires.
Hebrews 11:15-16

15 If they had been thinking of that land from which they had gone out, they would have had opportunity to return. 16 But as it
is, they desire a better country, that is, a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared for them a city.
Do not be like Esau, who traded his heavenly birthright for a bowl of earthly pottage. Do
not be like the wedding guests whose response was “I cannot come to the banquet; don’t trouble me now. I have married a wife, I have bought me a cow. I have fields and
commitments that cost a pretty sum. Pray hold me excused, I cannot come!” Do you want to come to the wedding feast of the Lamb? If you do, I have good news for you—not only
will you be a guest, but you will be the Bride! What amazing blessings await you if only you have eyes to see, and ears to hear, of the good news of salvation in Christ. Desire the
blessings of salvation, and set your mind on the things that are above. It is worth it beyond your wildest imaginations. Paul says,
Philippians 3:8-11  

8 Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ.
Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ
9 and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness
from God that depends on faith—10 that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings.
becoming like him in his death, 11 that by any means possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.
Application.
1. 

Now do you set your mind on things above? Take stock of your thought life. On what objects do you allow your thoughts to
dwell? What station do you tune your radio to? What songs fill your head? What are you watching on the TV, reading in the paper, talking about when you sit
down and when you rise up? On weekdays does your Bible, do the very words of God, sit unread and unheard amidst a clamor of worldly information in your
life? What thoughts fill your mind when you become angry at someone in your household? I tell you, what goes into your mind today will come out of your
heart tomorrow. Are they the things of God? Or the things of this world?

Take Paul’s warning to heart when he tells you,
1 Timothy 6:10-11  

10 ...the love of money is a root of all kinds of evils. It is through this craving that some have
wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pangs. 11 But as for you, O man of God, flee these things.
Pursue
righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness.
Christian, there is a more pure love than the love of this world. You have a higher calling, a calling from God above. Cry out to God with a pure devotion to Him.
Psalm 73:25-26

25 Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth
that I desire besides you. 26 My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.
Because Christ is your life 3-4

1.

Now why should you set your mind on things
above, and not on earthly things? What is the reason for doing this? In v. 1 Paul has already given you the ground for his exhortation--“
you have been raised with Christ.
” But now he drives you to the vital core of why you must set your mind on things above. The reason is that
Christ is your life. He says,

1.

3. For you have died, and your life is hidden with...
Col. 3:1-4 - Set Your Mind on Things Above

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Christ in God. 4 When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.
2. The fact.

1. I want to be
frank with you. I don’t think many of you fully believe what this passage says. It says that “Christ... is your life.” It does not say
Christ is the source of your life, though He certainly is that. But it says Christ is your life. It
does not say Christ is the Guarantor of your life. It says Christ IS your life. Do you believe that?
2.

If you don’t believe that, then you lack the vital reason to set your mind on
things above. If you do believe that, then you do not need any other reason to set your mind on things above. Christ is your life.
3. Paul cannot be denying the biblical distinction between the Creator and
the creature. Scripture is absolutely clear that there is an absolute distinction between the being of God and
the being of man. God is not human. Man is not divine. Not in any way.

4.
Yet for those who are saved, Christ is your life. His life is your life. He is the core of your eternal life.
1 John 1:2 2
the life was made manifest, and we have seen it, and testify to it and
proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us.
If you did not have Christ, you would not have this life.
1 John 5:11-12  
11 And this is the testimony, that God gave us
eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12 Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does
not have life.

- But if you are
a Christian, Christ’s life is manifest in you.
Corinthians 4:10-11

10 always carrying in the body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also
be manifested in our bodies.
His life is what animates you. It is what makes you a new creature. It is because He lives in you
that you have eternal life.

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Galatians 2:20

20 I have
been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.
This is what Christ told you
when He was still with you.

- John
14:19-20

Yet a little while and the world will see me no more, but you will see me.
Because I live, you also will live.

20 In that day you will know that I am in my Father,
and you in me, and I in you.
Illustrations
1. The fact that Christ is your life is like a nation ruled...
exclusively by a king that can truthfully say the king is the nation. If we lose the king, we lose
the nation. Its distinctive life is gone.

2.
It is like a wife who
knows “If my husband dies, I
lose my marriage.”
3. It is like a boxing manager who says “If I lose
my prize fighter, “my business is dead.”

4.
It is like a blood donor who warns the nurse, “If you take two thirds of my blood, you will
take my life.”

5.

It is like a patient on a
heart-lung machine who says "Where this machine goes, I go, because this machine is my
life.”
Application

1. If Christ is your life, you
must pay attention to where He is. You must pay attention to the things He is doing for
you. You must set your mind to follow His priorities, His plans, the course of His life. And
where He goes your heart, and mind, and life must follow.

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Philippians 1:21  For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.
He has now gone on into
heaven, into glory, where you do not yet see Him. And so Paul says that our life is “hid” with
Christ in God. It is hidden for now, and so you must believe by faith in the as yet
unseen glory of the inheritance kept for you, ready to be revealed at the last time. And
as 1 John 3:2-3 says, we must purify ourselves in the hope of the day when His
full glory will finally be revealed.
1 John

3:2-3  2

Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not
yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because
we shall see him as he is. 3 And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he
is pure.
If you know that Christ is your life, then be one of those of whom 1 Peter 1:8-9 speaks:
1 Peter
1:8-9
Though you have not
seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and
rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of
your faith, the salvation of your souls.
And know this for certain, that when He
appears in all of the glory of His resurrection life, you too will appear
with Him in glory.  For

-—

Philippians
3:20-21  
our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a
Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, 21 who will transform our lowly body to
be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to
subject all things to himself.
John Eadie, Commentary, 215.