

## New Hope Sermon 9 2 18 A Transforming Perspective – Col. 3:1-4

I want to open with a story that sets the tone for our theme today. It is from our member Hilary Mushambi in South Africa: :

“Walking home from the park today with one child in each hand and a baby strapped to my chest someone said to me, "you've got your hands full!" I was so glad to finally get a chance to use my new response (instead of a stammered, I sure do), I answered "and my heart is full too!" (Thanks Ellie Moore 😊) Amazing what a change of perspective that provided me. Instead of thinking how exhausting it is running after three little people I had reminded myself about how blessed I was to have all three of them in my life. Definitely tucking that response away for future use.” (Hilary Mushambi 9/2/18 Facebook)



“It’s amazing what a change in perspective does.” And that’s the key to our text in Col. 3:1-5: *Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. <sup>4</sup> When Christ, who is your <sup>[a]</sup> life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.*

Setting our minds on things above...where Christ is give us a new focus for our thinking and a new perspective for everything we do in this life. It is a key to a life of blessing and fruit.

The book I reviewed last week is called *How Joyful People Think* by Jamie Rasmussen. In the Introduction he cites a study done of Olympic medal winners,

specifically contrasting levels of satisfaction and happiness among gold, silver and bronze winners. The researchers compared facial expressions and body language and found that third place bronze medal winners were quantifiably happier than the second-place silver medal winners....Third place medalists were thrilled simply to receive a medal...The second place finishers, however, focused solely on how close they came to being first...The psychologists performing this study would go on to call this phenomenon ‘counterfactual thinking’ – the ability to think differently about a circumstance than the facts would appear to dictate.” J.Rasmussen, *How Joyful People Think*, Baker Books, 2018, pp. 19-20)

Jamie’s conclusion is that “It all boils down to perspective – the ability to have our thoughts make all the difference to our joy.”(p. 21). Basing his conclusion on Philippians 4:8 he adds “God offers a way for us to experience counterfactual thinking in our own lives.” In psychology this can be linked to the tendency to create possible alternatives to events that have already occurred – i.e., what might have been better or worse. But it fits here because Paul is urging his readers to think from God’s perspective, not from the view of of current reality as culture depicts it. Instead, we “must learn to live life from the vantage point of God’s declared mindset. Doing so involves his prescribed way of thinking... God’s way of giving us peace – real peace – is through our having the right kind of perspective” (Rasmussen, *Ibid*, pp. 20, 22, 24).

Counterfactual thinking. I like this phrase. I think we need it in order to live in the truths of col. 3. Let’s consider some of the other forces that view for our attention and focus. For example, media advertising.

The average American watches TV for nearly 30 hours per week. That's 65 days of nonstop TV watching every year. By the time they graduate from high school, students will have viewed 360,000 commercials. The average 65-year-old will have watched two million commercials. Each of these commercials has been created by smart people who pack their ads with powerful images, catchy music and humor, and memorable slogans. Most of the commercials have a primary theme: this product will

give you true happiness and deep satisfaction. Based on the worldview presented by TV commercials, here's how one pastor has rewritten the Beatitudes spoken by Jesus:

Blessed are those who fly to luxury vacation spots on tropical islands, where they lie in chaise lounge chairs, the only two people on an enormous white beach; for they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who drink much beer, for they shall be surrounded by carefree, football-watching buddies and highly attractive, socially-gifted women in the first half of life; and they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who have the latest smartphone, for they shall gaze on a screen swirling with color and shall get all the information they need just when they need it; and they shall be satisfied.

Blessed are those who have outstanding kids. Verily I say to you, highly blessed are those who have a golden Labrador retriever bounding along on that slow-motion-videoed day of playing with the kids in the park, for they shall be the envy of real families everywhere; and they shall be satisfied.

*Catholic Education Resource Center, "Television Statistics and Sources"*

Really?

Or the distraction of our smartphones:

The city of Salzburg in Austria is implementing some creative measures to protect public safety from oblivious pedestrians staring at their smartphones. The city's Board for Traffic Safety (KFV) said that nearly 40 percent of the injured pedestrians involved in accidents were injured because they were distracted by a smartphone device. "... Pedestrians are involved in more accidents in the city than anyone else on the streets, including cyclists, moped drivers, and car drivers."

"Smartphone zombies," as they have been referred to, are a common problem in many highly trafficked areas around the world. Honolulu just signed a law that bans pedestrians from looking at their smartphones while crossing the street, thus becoming the first city in America to pass a law aimed at reducing injuries and deaths associated with distracted walking.

In Austria there are now large airbags around street-side lampposts that urge pedestrians to stay alert. The bags serve a double purpose. They may actually protect some people from absentmindedly wandering "smack" into a lamp post. But the messaging on the airbags reinforces the need for pedestrians to stay vigilant while walking the busy streets. Roughly translated, the airbags read: *"Will the next car also be so well padded?"*



*Professor Alan Noble writes:* Most days I can hardly hear myself think.

It feels like there are a million voices calling for my attention as long as I'm awake: text messages, work emails, kids wanting a drink of water, looming deadlines, billboards, the sense of missing Something Important on social media, breaking news, Instagram, app notifications, Netflix, podcasts, music, a smartwatch telling me to stand up.

My mind is scattered and cloudy most of the time. Probably as a result, I often discover that I'm anxious or depressed or worried about *something* but I can't remember *what*, let alone *why*. There's just too much going on. So when these feelings come, the easiest and most efficient thing to do is unlock my phone. And then the dread mostly goes away, for a little while. A shot of dopamine from Twitter keeps the anxiety away.

It's not just the technology that creates this feeling, it's also how ordered and scheduled and deadlined our lives are. We feel like we are constantly missing out on something or failing to do enough. There are always more shows, exercise, dishes, dieting, organizing, reading, and podcasts to catch up on.

The effect of all this is that from the moment we get out of bed until we crash at night, life feels like a buzz of attention-grabbing technology and busyness for a lot of modern people. One of my great worries about this distraction is that it makes recognizing and repenting of sin hard to do. When do we have the time to quietly reflect on our day and prayerfully evaluate our actions and words? Alan Noble, assistant professor of English at Oklahoma Baptist University and the editor in chief of Christ and Pop Culture.

It's these distractions that keep our focus away from living the truths of Col.3:1-3. So what is the truth of Col. 3 that is worthy of all of our attention and direction in life?

Pastor Kent Hughes says the things above "have to do with Christ's sovereign reign over the universe as he fills the universe with his power. They include his character, his presence, his heavenly joys" (Kent Hughes, Colossians commentary, p. 90). Interesting. What do you think those heavenly joys are? I think they include the love and presence Jesus shares within the Godhead – with the Father and the Spirit, the blessings when any of His followers show their love to Him in obedience, the joys of providing answers to believers' prayers, the blessing of shepherding churches which are serious about fulfilling His global agenda, the ways Christians show love to one another and demonstrate His reality to the world, the satisfaction of watching believers win in their daily struggles against Satan and the forces of evil. His heavenly joys. We get to participate in that when we are seated with Christ.

That is eternal truth. But for it to be ours Paul says we need to set our minds on these realities. So what is your mind focused on? Anxiety? Lust? Sorrow? Fear? The verb set "is in the present imperative, which means a continuous, ongoing effort is required...It is a deliberate act of the will" (Hughes, *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91). Colossians 3 says it is to focus on how we can live out the resurrected life with Christ in our context. It is living with the certainty that just as Christ has conquered sin and risen triumphant over it and over all evil, we can too. It's living with the heart for eternity which God has planted within us when we came to Christ. It is making the seemingly impossible possible because of God's power and sovereignty.

Take the example of the homing instinct of the bar-tailed godwit. This bird lives in a counterfactual reality for sure.

According to [Robert Krulwich's blog on NPR](#), this small bird grows up in northern Alaska, but every fall they fly nearly 7,000 miles to New Zealand. When the young birds mature and start to migrate, something wired in them also directs them to New Zealand." Here's what counterfactual: "Though they are land birds, and cannot fish or rest on the sea, they will cross most of the Pacific Ocean, and fly all the way to New Zealand. Many of them are young, and have never done this before. How they do that, many of them never having been in the southern hemisphere, never having seen the southern stars, nobody seems to know. But they manage. One female, dubbed E7, because that was the code on her wireless transmitter, flew 11,680 kilometers (7,369 miles) in 8.1 days. Non-stop. The same homing signal that guides them over treacherous waters to New Zealand also navigates them back to their parents. They don't need a literal map. God gets them there and back. Similarly, humans also have "homing signals" for God and eternity. He has put eternity in our hearts." *Adapted from Robert Krulwich, "The Toughest Little Bird You've Never Heard Of," NPR's Krulwich Wonders blog (9-21-11)*

Paul's word to the Colossians challenges us: Are we listening to God's homing signals? God has enabled us to be risen with Christ – living in the reality Christ has now. We are actually seated with him, joining him in his place of power and authority - all authority as we said 2 weeks ago. And so the return of the application question from 2 weeks ago: How has Jesus' victory over evil affected your life this week? That the rub. IF we live in Christ's reality, with our hearts and minds set there, then it is possible to experience God's victory over sin and self and over all the distractions that steal our focus and energy. It IS possible to live with our ego self no longer in control (you have died) and our

risen, new self helping us live for God each hour of the day. We can live with the spiritual reality that we are risen in Christ.

Let me share how God made this real to me this past week. On Monday we had a retreat for graduate internationals on Academia and Soul Care. The topic comes out of my pastoral passion to see each member of the church thrive and maintain health in their spiritual and emotional lives amid the academic pressures and stresses they will face. Evan and I worked on it together. But the morning of the retreat I wanted to sing a song we hadn't discussed: *By My Spirit* – that emphasized the necessity of all our academics being done by the power of the Spirit, not in our own strength or wisdom. I put the song at Evan's table to see if he knew it but didn't have a chance to talk to him in depth that day. He said OK, but at the retreat that song fell apart, breaking the flow of the Spirit. and I became upset and frustrated. After the retreat I noticed that several accusing thoughts began to surface in my mind and I began to think from a fleshly perspective – focusing on his mistakes. After about 2 hours of that negative rumination, God called me on it. I had not shown mercy or felt merciful to him. Ever felt like that?

My attitude was sinful and selfish, despite all the mercy God continually shows me, particularly when I get frustrated with Alzheimer's behavior in Keith. I am needing to continually ask for God's forgiveness and empowerment to change in that relationship, and I am so grateful for God's support and the support and understanding of many of you when I fail in this area. Plus, I recognized that the accusing thoughts that began to mount in my mind toward Evan were all coming from Satan – who is constantly accusing us to one another and breaking our fellowship ties. This is particularly important, beloved, because accusing thoughts tip us off to Satan's work in our minds and must be resisted and cast out.

So with the Spirit's prompting and help, I confessed my wrong thinking to God toward Evan, rebuked Satan's work, and then messaged Evan at 10:30 that night. I didn't know if he would still be up but I wanted to clear the air and apologize for my thinking and seek reconciliation. Immediately, he came downstairs and we had a time of mutual confession and forgiveness. What I noticed from that was that all my negative thoughts vanished – they were no longer churning through my mind and I had peace and joy restored. God helped me recognize my sin, confess it, die to it and then seek the things that are above – reconciliation, harmony, and partnership restored so we could continue to work together for His kingdom.

But I also realized the next day that when God forgives and puts our sins away in the farthest ocean, he also puts up a sign that says NO Fishing. We are not to go back to old negative thoughts. God helped me view life, including myself and the gift Evan is, from His perspective. Just like Hilary said: Instead of “wow, you've really got your hands full,” it can now be “wow, I am so blessed to have these dear three little people, (like Evan for me,) in my life.”

It's all a matter of living in that transformed perspective by the power of the Spirit.

Perhaps this quote will help us reframe our counterfactual reality more clearly:

“For too long, we've called unbelievers to “invite Jesus into your life.” Jesus doesn't want to be in your life. Your life's a wreck. Jesus calls you into his life. And his life isn't boring or purposeless or static. It's wild and exhilarating and unpredictable.” *Russell Moore, "A Purpose Driven Cosmos," Christianity Today (February 2012)*

Why would we possibly believe what Russell Moore says = that we have a wild and exhilarating and unpredictable life? Is this more Christian Disneyland thinking? A pie in the sky lack of realism? No, actually not. We can have that kind of life because Jesus is now seated above all the evil and struggle in this world and in us. He is reigning in the heavenly places next to God the Father. He is at the throne room of heaven praying for us. And He calls us to join Him there and let him take the reins of our life and lead us forward onto his agenda. Nothing humdrum about that!

It's all a matter of perspective. Tim Keller puts it this way:

Imagine you're a billionaire, and you have three ten-dollar bills in your wallet. You get out of a cab, and you hand the driver one of the bills for an eight-dollar fare. Later in the day you look in and find out there's only one ten-dollar bill there, and you say, "Either I dropped a ten-dollar bill somewhere, or I gave the taxi driver two bills."

What are you going to do? Are you going to get all upset? Are you going to the police and demand they search the city for the cabdriver? No, you are going to shrug. You're a billionaire. You lost ten dollars. So what? You are too rich to be concerned about that kind of loss.

This week, somebody criticized you. Something you bought or invested in turned out to be less valuable than you thought. Something you wanted to happen didn't go the way you wanted it to—these are real losses. But what are you going to do, if you're a Christian? Will this setback disrupt your contentment with life? Will you shake your fist at God? Toss and turn at night? If so, I submit that it's because you don't know how truly rich you are. If you're that upset about your status with other people, if you're constantly lashing out at people for hurting your feelings, you might call it a lack of self-control or a lack of self-esteem, and it is. But more fundamentally, you have totally lost touch with your identity. As a Christian, you're a spiritual billionaire and you're wringing your hands over ten dollars. *Tim Keller, The Two Advocates (Encounters with Jesus Series) (Penguin Group, 2014), Kindle Locations 242-244*

As a Christian you are a billionaire. If we are raised with Christ, how does living seated with Christ in the heavenlies make us billionaires? Because we can share in all His riches – of power, of authority, of glory and joy, of the love of the Father and the praise of heaven. Of belonging now to the family of God – we are heirs of God and joint heirs of Christ (Rom.8:17). We have entered into the realm of the God who lavishes us with all wisdom and understanding (Eph. 1:8). We can experience every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3), we can know the “riches of his grace” (Eph.2:7). We are secure, we are loved, we belong, we have everything we need for life and godliness (2 pet. 1:3), we have His all-sufficient grace (2 Cor. 12:9).

Divine perspective means that we live within these realities. Not the defining realities of our sinfulness or our weakness or our insecurity or our fear or our stress or our anxieties or cultural dictates. We can live within the defining realities of God's victorious, grace and love which has been poured out abundantly on us in Christ and which is part of Christ's authority and power in heaven where we are seated with Him! That's counterfactual reality. A spiritual reality that transcends everything else around us.

Let that reality fill us. Let it change our focus. Let it transform our lives. Let God be God for us, beloved, so we can be His transformed people – living like Christ in the world. For His sake.

*Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. <sup>2</sup> Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. <sup>3</sup> For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. Amen.*

*Dr. M.L. Codman-Wilson 9/2/18*