

*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 life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)*

### **What are You Thinking About Today?**

This is a very easy day to be distracted, isn't it? I mean, you're probably thinking about a thousand different things, like the Easter breakfast and what you have to do to serve or clean up. You're probably thinking about Easter dinner – how much has to be done or how long you'll have to wait if you go to a restaurant or how busy it will be if you're going to a relative's. Are you thinking about Easter egg hunts or Easter baskets? How late were you up last night getting those things prepared? Especially you ladies, who find that many of these concerns fall on you, may be thinking how much you'd like a nap and wondering why our services are so much earlier today than you're used to. It's Easter Sunday. What are you thinking about? St. Paul asks us that question in the verses from Colossians that I just read to you. Of course, he wasn't thinking about the things I just mentioned – none of those Easter traditions existed yet. He was thinking about more general concerns of this life. Leaving aside the hustle and bustle that accompanies all holidays, **what are you thinking about today?**

#### **I.**

**Are you thinking about Christ?** What else would we be thinking about today? You all heard the greatest announcement ever in our gospel lesson. Very early in the morning – even earlier than we got here today – a group of women set out for Jesus' tomb. They were not thinking joyful thoughts. They were going to complete the burial of someone they loved. But that's not what they did that morning. They got to the tomb where Jesus' dead body had been laid. But that tomb stood open. Inside, an angel announced, **"He is not here; he has risen, just as he said."** That's the heart and soul of this celebration today.

Yet, does it ever seem like that story is somewhat lacking in practical value? What does it have to do with the things that we have to think about today? I don't mean Easter eggs and baskets. I mean the real issues that you wrestle with. What does Jesus' resurrection have to do with the fact that you're making less money this year than last year and you don't know how you're going to keep your house? What does Jesus' resurrection have to do with declining health and chronic aches and pains? What does Jesus' resurrection have to do with all the struggles that will still be there tomorrow when the holiday is over?

Everything because Jesus' resurrection means that we are going to triumph over all those things. That's exactly why Paul said, **"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things."** Each of us makes decisions every day about what we're going to concentrate on today. Most of us have things we'd like to do. But most days, we don't get to do those things. Instead, we go to work or school. Or we do maintenance on our houses. Or we run around to doctor's appointments and grocery shopping and take care of fifteen other things that demand our time and attention. Why do we do those things instead of things we like to do? Because they have to be done.

St. Paul is talking exactly about that kind of thinking. He's saying that most of the time, our priorities are wrong. He tells us that we rose with Christ. When we hear the message the angel proclaimed, he's telling us something that changes our lives forever. Jesus rose from the dead. And he saved us from death and hell. He raised us already here and now and gave us a new and different set of priorities. How did Jesus raise us? We haven't died yet. He gave us faith. Each of us was dead in sin before we knew Christ. But when we learned that Jesus rose, the Holy Spirit reached into our hearts and gave us faith. He made us alive in Christ. That means we have a different set of priorities now. All other stuff comes in second. What comes in first is our life with Christ.

Why? Because all that other stuff is temporary. For every moment that we have to wrestle here with our finances or our health or anything else, we will have an eternity with Christ without struggle or hardship or difficulty. What's more important? Uncountable millions of years with Christ or 70 or 80 years here? Isn't it the uncountable years with Christ? That's what we need to fix our eyes on. The most important thing of this

life is reaching eternal life. It's so important that the Son of God came down here and made himself a human being so that he could die and rise to give us that life. It's so important that he let Roman soldiers drive nails through his hands and feet and he let his Father in heaven abandon him to hell and then death on the cross. It's so important that God paid the highest price that ever could be paid so that we will have that life.

God calls us to put that life ahead of all those other concerns. God calls us to worry first about getting to heaven and then about making our house payment. God call us to first make sure our children know their Savior – that they get to church, that we spend time with them talking about Jesus, that we spend our hard earned money and our precious time building their faith – and then we can worry about whether we can go on vacation this year or whether they can be on the swim team. Do we understand that God is totally serious when he says that if we put maintaining our faith first, he will take care of the rest?

That's a hard attitude to adopt. Common sense says that no one else is going to make your house payment or your car payment or your credit card payment for you. No one else is going to worry about your financial well being, so you have jump through whatever hoops the boss puts out there, even if means you don't get to spend time in church. You only have so many years with those kids to send them to camp and buy them expensive stuff – those years go by so fast, you know that one day you'll look up and long for them to be kids again. So you put more money and more time into creating memories with them and you figure they can worry about getting to church when they're older and we can worry about financial support for the church when our lives are different.

All that seems so practical. But it's exactly the kind of thinking that needs to change. Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. Now God is not telling us to ignore our responsibilities. But he is telling us that the number one thing in our lives is Christ. He is seated at the right hand of God. He won. He rules everything. He decides what we have to face in our lives. He calls us to trust in him and put him first. He gives us holidays like today to remind us what really matters in this life.

What are you thinking about today and every day of your life? How hard is it for you to put Christ first and to trust God to take care of all the rest? All too often, the things of this world crowd the things of heaven out of our minds. It's so easy to let Jesus slip into third or fourth or fiftieth place. My friends, that's just sin. It's exactly the kind of attitude that earned death and hell for us in the first place. It's why Jesus had to suffer that hell and that death on the cross.

But he did suffer that hell and that death. He did pay for our twisted priorities and our selfish reasons for putting what we care about or worry about or want ahead of what God has done and said. Jesus died and paid because in our hearts every one of us worships ourselves as God. Then he rose. When the angel announced that the tomb was empty, he was announcing to all people everywhere that the full price of our sin and self-worship was paid. He was saying that Jesus covered the cost for all of us and God has forgiven our twisted priorities and selfish reasons. He was saying that even though we still deserve death and hell, we're going to live forever. We're going to rise from the dead. We're going to have that eternity in joy with Christ that will wipe out all the tears and all the struggles that we face now and make it seem like a half-remembered dream from a long time ago. And until we get there, he is going to take care of everything that we have to face here. Today we are celebrating that gift of Christ.

## II.

You have been raised with Christ. You have eternal life. That's the message of Easter. Yet, St. Paul understood how hard it is to keep focused on what really matters. **What are you thinking about today? Are you thinking about your true life?**

Paul says, **"For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."** Now, I've officiated at way too many funerals to think that I get to preach to you after you're gone. So what does Paul mean when he says that we died? In the Bible, the word death always carries the idea of separation. Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. The Bible says that we were dead in our trespasses and sins – we were separated from God. The Bible calls hell "death" because the people there will never reconnect with God. Sometimes, God makes the idea of death positive. He tells us to die to sin – to separate sin from our lives.

When Jesus physically died, we died with him. God counted his payment for us. When God told us that good news and made us believers, he separated us from death and hell. He separated us from the consequences of our sin. He also separated us from the power of sin. Before we know Christ, we can't do anything but sin. Even the best things we do are totally contaminated by sin. That idea is a little difficult for us to accept. I have

a question on one of my catechism worksheets and every year, almost every student gets it wrong. It says, true or false: “Everybody has some good in them.” What do you think? Every year, most of the kids put true. But it’s totally false. We have no good in us, until the Holy Spirit comes in the gospel and moves into our hearts. . So we were slaves of sin and dead to God. But when Jesus died, we died with him. God separated us from the power of sin in our hearts. Now, because the Holy Spirit has remade us, a part of us can do good.

But it’s hard for us to see that because we still aren’t perfect. Paul says that our life is now hidden with Christ in God. We can’t see the freedom from the power of sin that God has given us because we still wrestle with temptation. Every one of us has weaknesses that get the best of us over and over again. Sometimes we wonder if we have any faith at all. Our life is hidden in Christ even from our own hearts – which is why feelings are such an unreliable indicator of our faith. The believer inside us understands that. He knows where he’s going and has no doubts. But we are all unbelievers at the same time that we are believers. We all struggle with trusting what God says. When we struggle with the things that make our lives difficult, when temptation crashes our best efforts and we fail again, it seems like that hidden life isn’t real at all.

But that’s why we come back here again and again. Our true life is hidden with Christ. So day after day, we need to hear what God says to enable us to trust his promise. Paul says, **“When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.”** It’s not always going to be like this. It’s not always going to be hard. Jesus is coming back for us. When he does, it won’t be hard to see our real life at all. When he comes back for us, we will be free from our sinful nature forever. We will rise and live with him in perfect joy, with no struggles or heartaches ever again.

That all began on Easter Sunday morning. Jesus rose and he gave us a new life, a life that is hidden now, but a life that is very real. Jesus rose and his promise of eternal life is the most important promise we will ever hear. Jesus rose, my friends. Set your minds on him and his promise. Make that the priority of your life down here. Look forward to the day when you can see it with your physical eyes. Amen.