

February 11th, 2018

Scripture:

Psalm 50:1-6

Colossians 3:1-17

“Eyes on Christ everyone, eyes on Christ.”

Somehow --- over and over again ----- Paul seemed to find just the right words --- at just the right time --- for just the right people.

And of course that somehow is the will of God --- the blessing of God.

Paul has never even been to Colossae --- he’s imprisoned in Rome when he writes this letter to them.

Indeed he’s about 2,000 kilometers away from the Colossians ----- which is a long way in year 60 --- with no airplanes --- railways or motor vehicles.

According to Google it would take approximately 211 walking hours to get to Colossae from Rome --- I didn’t even know there such a thing as walking time between 2 points on Google until my son recently pointed this out --- we were looking something up how long it was going to take us to drive somewhere and he said or we could just walk ---- and looked at the walking time according to Google.

The point is Paul is a long long way from Colossae when he writes this letter to them.

He’s in jail in Rome --- he’s never even been to where the Colossian Christians live and worship --- but he is addressing them out of his deep love for them as fellow believers in need.

And similar to his letter to the Ephesians --- Christians in Ephesus ----- and some of his other letters as well ---- Paul writes to the Colossian Christians to address certain poor and less than faithful teachings and get the believers back on track and more faithful to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

For the Colossians --- certainly in chapter 3 anyway --- Paul is desperate to remind them that they have everything they need in Jesus Christ.

Paul reminds them that Christ has absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency.

Absolute supremacy and sole sufficiency.

I can well imagine Paul's letter as a kind of shout out to them --- with Paul hollering out to them ----- "Hey guys ----- Eyes on Christ everyone, eyes on Christ."

The first few verses from our New Testament passage today read ----
 "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."

"Set your heart on things above where Christ is." ----- or set your hearts on Christ --- or ----- "Eyes on Christ everyone, eyes on Christ."

As I was thinking about this passage over the week I was reminded of a joke I once heard --- it goes something like this.

The site manger is walking through an estate house with the real estate agent showing them all the special features of the house just before it goes on the market.

And just about every time he enters into a room --- he goes over to the window and yells out --- "Hey guys --- green side up."

"Hey guys --- green side up."

After about the fourth room --- the agents says --- this is a beautiful house --- lots of little extra's ---- I'm not going to have any problem selling it --- I've got a few clients that I already know are interested ----- but I have to ask --- "What's with the sticking your head out the window every few minutes and hollering --- "Hey guys --- green side up."

The manger replies ---- "Oh yeah that ---- I've got my grounds crew laying sod and unless I keep yelling green side up ----- they'll start laying it brown side up --- so green side up reminds them well ---- green side up."

"Hey guys green side up." ----- obvious but clearly also necessary.

“Eyes on Christ everyone, eyes on Christ.” --- obvious but also necessary.

If you’ve had the opportunity to read over some of the annual report you’ll notice that this passage from Colossians is also the passage I opened my report with.

And in the annual report I’ve quoted from Eugene Peterson’s Bible translation known as *The Message* ---- as it states the supremacy and sufficiency of Christ so bluntly and powerfully --- it’s better than the NIV for this passage --- at least the opening 5 verses anyway.

Verses 1-5 in *The Message* read -----

“So if you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it.

Pursue the things over which Christ presides.

Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you.

Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ --- that’s where the action is.

See things from his perspective.

Your old life is dead.

Your new life, which is your real life ---- even though invisible to spectators --- is with Christ in God.

He is your life.

When Christ (your real life, remember) shows up again on this earth, you’ll show up, too --- the real you, the glorious you.

Meanwhile, be content with obscurity, like Christ.

And that means killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That’s a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God.”

I particularly like the last little bit there verse 5 --- living with eyes on Christ includes -----

“...killing off everything connected with that way of death: sexual promiscuity, impurity, lust, doing whatever you feel like whenever you feel

like it, and grabbing whatever attracts your fancy. That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God."

"That's a life shaped by things and feelings instead of by God."

Stopping doing whatever we feel like whenever we feel like it ----- stopping grabbing whatever attracts our fancy ---- living a life shaped by God instead of things and feelings can present quite the challenge.

We've all had to go through this painful transition very early on in our lives as babies without even knowing it.

As babies we want whatever we want --- whatever we feel like right away --- right now --- and when we don't get them we throw hissy fits --- we cry and wail until we get what we want when we want it.

We come out of the womb --- and we want to get whatever we want and feel like ---- right when we want it.

I'm hungry and I'm hungry now feed me or I'll scream ----- I'm tired so I'm going to sleep now --- whether you like it or not I'm going to sleep now --- oh look I'm already asleep.

And it takes months and even years for this --- "give me what I want when and how and why I want it" ----- to be broken out of us.

As Paul said ---- "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me."

"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."

"Eyes on Christ."

Moving from newborn ---- to baby --- to toddler --- to preschooler --- and so on ---- involves a complete retraining of how we see the world --- and how our needs and feelings --- and wants and longings are met and satisfied.

And it's the very same on our Christian discipleship journey.

Our journey in faith --- our keeping our eyes on Jesus ----- involves a complete retraining of how we see the world --- and how our needs and feelings --- and wants and longings --- are defined ----- met and satisfied.

And Colossians 3 isn't the only place in scripture that this complete retraining --- refocusing ---- reprioritizing is emphasized.

In 2 Corinthians 4:18 ----- Paul writes ----

“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.”

And again in 1 Corinthians 3:19 we have a similar sentiment ----- “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.”

And there are plenty more examples than just these --- especially in Paul's writings --- he's an expert on turn arounds as he once so vehemently persecuted Christians.

The way of the cross ---- Christian discipleship --- the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ is all about a whole new way of being and seeing things.

And unless we keep our eyes fixed on Him ---- we quickly start to slide back into selfish ---- self centered earthly needs wants and desires mode again.

In her book ----“Teaching Kids Authentic Worship: How To Keep Them Close To God For Life” ----- Kathleen Chapman writes -----

“When we take our eyes off ourselves, miracles happen!

When our focus is taken off ourselves and directed toward God, our seemingly overwhelming problems and life situations pale before His majestic brilliance.

When we actually sit in awe of God, we are transformed.

We become new creations.”

That's precisely what Paul is talking about here in Colossians 3.

“When we take our eyes off ourselves, miracles happen!

When our focus is taken off ourselves and directed toward God, our seemingly overwhelming problems and life situations pale before His majestic brilliance.

When we actually sit in awe of God, we are transformed.
We become new creations.”

Whoever is in Christ is a new creation --- Paul goes so far as to say ---- we heard it after our opening prayer ---- “Whoever is in Christ is a new creation --- the old has passed away and everything has become new.” ---- from 2 Corinthians 5:17.

When our eyes are on Christ --- when our focus is on Christ --- when we are concerned more with the things that God is concerned with --- miracles happen --- we are changed --- transformed even ----- we are made new --- and we are made new because of Christ --- and for Christ.

And it’s a beautiful --- and it’s a powerful --- and it’s a life giving ----- awe inspiring thing to watch and be a part of.

And it is precisely what God desires for us.

And more than just this --- God not only desires this for us --- but He also provides the way for us to experience it --- and live in this beautiful reality eternally.

By keeping our eyes on Christ --- by keeping our focus on Christ we soon see that miracles --- acts of God happen in our everyday lives.

That’s the beauty and goodness and truth --- the saving love of Jesus Christ -- God doesn’t just want something for us ---- He also shows us precisely where and how to get it for ourselves.

The Gospel is not some obscure formula --- or complicated set of directions or instructions.

God cares enough ---- God loves enough to give us exactly --- and precisely all that we need.

“Hey guys --- green side up.” ----- is all you really need to lay sod properly.

“Eyes on Christ everyone, eyes on Christ.” ---- is all you really need --- to engage on a faithful Christ centered ---- God pleasing --- transforming and miraculous journey in faith.

And that of course is precisely what we’re doing as a community of faith --- or at least trying to do --- day in and day out --- year in and year out --- keeping our eyes --- and our focus on Christ.

And this serves as a great reminder as we gather for our annual congregational meeting later today --- shortly --- after worship.

It’s all about keeping our eyes on Christ --- our focus on Christ --- and not just all of the other stuff in life --- in ministry --- in church life ----- that can all too easily obscure and corrupt our keeping focused on the Risen Sovereign Lord.

Gazing around down here like this --- as Paul says today ----- isn’t the best way of going about life.

“Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to what is going on around Christ --- that’s where the action is. See things from his perspective.”

“When we take our eyes off ourselves, miracles happen!

When our focus is taken off ourselves and directed toward God, our seemingly overwhelming problems and life situations pale before His majestic brilliance.

When we actually sit in awe of God, we are transformed.

We become new creations.” ----- this is the gospel of Lord Jesus Christ for today.

Sitting in awe of God --- keeping our eyes focused on Christ ---- submitting everything --- our very selves to His will.

Prostrating ourselves before God’s majestic brilliance --- beauty ----- goodness and truth in Jesus Christ ----- transforms us and we are made new.

Today as we continue to worship as we gather for our annual meeting we gather around the great and profound truth of the Risen One.

The One ---- who calls us to follow Him.

The One who is our vision.

We just sang “Be Thou My Vision” --- an oldie but a goodie ----- one of the best of the best.

And we’ll soon sing “In Christ alone” --- a newie and a goodie.

Both of these songs point to the supremacy and the sufficiency of Christ.

The supremacy and the sufficiency of Christ.

Christ has absolute supremacy and Christ has sole sufficiency ----- this is the profound and saving truth that we gather around --- hold up ----- and celebrate.

“When we take our eyes off ourselves, miracles happen!

When our focus is taken off ourselves and directed toward God, our seemingly overwhelming problems and life situations pale before His majestic brilliance.

When we actually sit in awe of God, we are transformed.

We become new creations.”

“Eyes on Christ everyone ---- eyes on Christ.”

Amen.