

Fix Your Thoughts
Part 4: Setting Your Sights on Jesus
June 28th, 2015

It's good to be with you today as we conclude our series, *Fix Your Thoughts*. Then, next week (4th of July weekend), I'll be teaching on what God has to say about our need to rest! Then, we'll begin our summer series called *God-Breathed*, which many of you helped us put together by sharing places in Scripture that have shaped your life. So, all summer long, we're going to look at the powerful effect of God's Word in our lives!

If you're a Christian, I'm going to guess that at some point you've asked a question that goes something like this... *"Now that I'm walking in Christ, what am I supposed to do? How do I grow in Christ? Is church attendance and small groups or volunteer ministry teams all there is to my life in Christ, or is there something more than this?"*

Or, maybe your questions sound more like these... *"Why is the Christian life so difficult? Why aren't I making the kind of progress I want to make or seeing change I want to see?"*

If you've asked those questions, there are few places in Scripture that get to the heart of what it means to live and grow in Christ like Colossians chapter three!

On the other hand, if you're not a Christian yet, but Jesus has been pursuing you in his mercy, which by the way is the only reason you would walk into the basement of a mill. You might be asking questions such as, *"What does it mean to be a Christian? If I become a Christian, how will that play out in my home, work, free time, finance, or romance?"*

If so, there are very few places in all of Scripture that give us a more beautiful picture of what it means to be a Christian than Colossians chapter three. Today, we're going to spend our time looking at the first four verses of this chapter! **Read with me, beginning in verse 1...the words of the Apostle Paul...**

"Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand. Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God. And when Christ, who is your life, is revealed to the whole world, you will also share in all his glory." Colossians 3:1-4

Set your Sights & Think about Things: In two different statements, Paul instructs us to do one thing. *"Set your sights on the realities of heaven."* And, *"Think about,"* or quite literally, *"Fix your thoughts on the things of heaven."*

Telescope: This past Christmas, we gave our oldest daughter Karlie a telescope, which she had been wanting for some time, and for all of you parents with very young

Fix Your Thoughts
Part 4: Setting Your Sights on Jesus
June 28th, 2015

children, it's a sweet day when your kids start requesting gifts that you enjoy too! Elmo shall soon pass! Now...I have very little experience with telescopes, so I was under the impression that the moment we pointed her telescope upwards, the heavens would immediately open before us!

But that's not what happened! Instead...we had to carefully select the right star; then, perfectly position the telescope and focus our lenses, all of which took a great deal of time and far more patience than I typically have but I was willing to do it all so that Karlie could catch her first glimpse of a star!

This is the image we're given... *"Fix your thoughts, set your sights on, focus in and let your eyes adjust to the realities of heaven where Christ sits in the place of honor at God's right hand!"*

Heaven – This isn't saying that we're to spend a lot of time and energy thinking about heaven as a place...although the promise of heaven can be encouraging and comforting! Instead, it's saying that we're to spend a great deal of time and energy thinking about Jesus Christ, the Lord of heaven!

The theme of Colossians is that above all else Christianity is a relationship with the Living King, Jesus Christ. And we grow up in Christ and experience things like freedom, peace, confidence and joy **to the degree** that we regularly and consistently set our attention and affection on Him!

All of Christianity begins with and builds on a personal relationship with Jesus Christ!

Now, historically speaking, the notion that it is possible for you and me to personally relate to a God who calls us His friends and desires to know, love and care for us...this is a completely foreign idea to virtually every major world religion you could find.

Roman gods – In his book, *The Triumph of Christianity*, historian Rodney Stark describes the view of god in the ancient Roman world during the time that the letter of Colossians was written. **Stark writes...**

The chief ingredient lacking in the traditional Roman faiths was love. Romans thought the gods might come to their aid, but they did not believe the gods loved them; instead, they feared the gods' anger and capriciousness.

In the middle of the third century, the emperor Decius took the throne just as the Roman Empire was beginning to falter. Roman armies were losing ground to invading barbarians, trade was collapsing, and the economy was falling apart. Decius came to the

Fix Your Thoughts
Part 4: Setting Your Sights on Jesus
June 28th, 2015

conclusion that all of Rome's troubles were of religious origin. He believed that for centuries the gods had smiled on and sustained an expansive and invincible Rome. But with the arrival of new religions, the traditional gods had been considerably neglected, and as a result they had begun to neglect Rome.

Decius decided that a religious revival was necessary to regain the favor of the gods who had made Rome great! So...he issued an edict requiring all inhabitants of the Empire to present a sacrifice to the gods!

Ancient religions, along with virtually every modern-day religion, are based upon the premise that if you want to succeed in life, work, romance, child rearing, or war, you must keep whatever god you happen to serve happy! **And without realizing it, this way of seeing God has a way of seeping into the way we relate to Him...**

You see...while most of us aren't going to gather later on at a local temple to slaughter a cow and eat its flesh, we may find ourselves believing that if we participate in worship gatherings or engage in spiritual practices or sacraments, things will go well with our family. Our jobs will be secure. God will keep us out of the emergency room. Or, if we're good to our neighbors, pay our taxes, and are generous, God will shower us with his kindness...like a good end-of-year bonus or return on our investments.

This is a contractual view of God! I scratch God's back... he scratches mine. I fulfill my end of the bargain, He makes good on his end!

The problem with this idea, besides the fact that it's completely unbiblical, is that it will destroy your peace and joy in Christ! Think about it! If you see God this way, what will happen when your circumstances falter? What happens when you receive bad news from the doctor, or your car breaks down, or you lose a job, or you don't get into the school you want? Anxiety replaces peace and life becomes a scramble to find what caused you to displease God, thereby causing Him to remove his love and care from you.

Or...if you have a contractual view of God, what happens when you experience personal failure or sin? If God's favor depends on your goodness, then His grace hangs on whether you can pull things together. Guilt and shame plague you when you fail to meet God's standard, and pride fills your life when you do.

Every week, churches are filled with very sincere people who gather, in part, for the purpose of getting God off their backs or to ensure, through religious observance, that God continues to bless them. It's possible that some of us have been relating to God this way...

Fix Your Thoughts
Part 4: Setting Your Sights on Jesus
June 28th, 2015

I want you to notice that Paul gives us a very different picture of how we are to relate to God!

“Set your sights on the realities of heaven, where Christ sits in the place of honor.” Colossians 3:1

Set your sights – Fix your eyes, look intently at, behold...seek to know and understand Jesus Christ!

New Orleans – Months ago, the couple who I had the pleasure of marrying last weekend, called and asked me to be part of their celebration in New Orleans; then, they sweetened the deal by offering to include Beth! Now, I don't know about you...but for us, four days together alone is quite possibly the greatest gift anyone could offer us.

So...we ate great food, we walked hand-in-hand through town; we were asleep by 10:00, slept past 6:30 and quietly enjoyed coffee every morning. But hands down the best part of those four days was that we were able to be together without interruption...no work, no meals to prepare, no carpooling or diapers to change or laundry to fold...all of which are necessary to leading a family and can even bring joy. But for those few moments, we were able to pause from the responsibilities of life and set our sights on one another by talking and laughing and praying and celebrating all that God has done in our lives in the past fifteen years...

And this is a great image of what it means to be a Christian! Being together with Jesus, listening to Jesus, knowing and enjoying Jesus.

Dick Lucas, who wrote a commentary on Colossians, says...

“The chief business of the Christian is to maintain his relationship with Christ.”
Dick Lucas

He's exactly right! The Christian life is one of knowing and enjoying Jesus Christ, and then living all of life – our work, marriages, friendships, parenting, and even our retirement on the foundation of a personal relationship with Him!

You might say... “Well, that's sounds great Jed. But how is that possible? Where do I begin?” With our last few moments, let me try to answer both...

Earlier in chapter one, we see what God has done on our behalf to bring us back to Him. These few verses are some of the most important in all of Scripture...

Fix Your Thoughts
Part 4: Setting Your Sights on Jesus
June 28th, 2015

“For God in all his fullness was pleased to live in Christ, and through him God reconciled everything to himself. He made peace with everything in heaven and on earth by means of Christ’s blood on the cross. This includes you who were once far away from God. You were his enemies, separated from him by your evil thoughts and actions. 1:19-21

See that...we were enemies of God...separated from Him because of our sin! Now, if our relationship with God were based on a contract, this might go on to say something like...
“So, now...try harder to obey the law. Live a good life. Be kind to your neighbor. Be pure in mind and thought...by doing so, you can repair your relationship with God.” **But that’s not what it says...**

(You were far from God) Yet now, (God) has reconciled you to himself through the death of Christ in his physical body.” 1:22a

Reconciled: In every other religion, it is man’s responsibility to secure God’s favor and keep Him happy! Only Christianity says that God poured out His favor on us when we least deserved it!

Only the gospel says that we have a Heavenly Father who loves us so much that He came into our world in the Person of Jesus Christ, wrapped himself in flesh, and laid down His life to pay the penalty for our sins!

This is an unthinkable love!

Wedding: I’ve had the opportunity to participate in three weddings in the last three weekends. Each time I have the honor of leading a couple through that experience, leading them through marriage vows, and watching their affection for one another, I’m reminded of the affection God has for His creation. Did you know, that the Bible not only says that marriage is a gift from God...but that marriage is a picture of God’s great love for His people! So...when a groom stands at the altar as his bride-to-be comes down the aisle toward Him...all that matters in that moment is that the groom has set his eyes and his heart on his bride...and she is drawn toward and walks into His loving embrace!

In the same way, the Bible describes Jesus Christ as the groom and the church as His bride! Do you realize how incredible of a picture this is? God set His eyes upon you, and like a groom looks at His bride, God looked at you with the same affection and said, “I’ve got to have you. I long to be reunited with you. I long to pour out my love, goodness, blessing, and protection on you!”

Fix Your Thoughts
Part 4: Setting Your Sights on Jesus
June 28th, 2015

Paul goes on to describe the effects of Christ's sacrifice for us! Listen closely...

As a result (of his death), he has brought you in to his own presence, and you are holy and blameless as you stand before him without a single fault." Colossians 1:22b

Did you catch that? If you have placed the trust of your heart in Jesus Christ, not only do you belong to Him...today you stand in God's presence...holy, blameless and without a single fault?

What about my past? Surely that separates me (blameless)

What about my inconsistency? Surely that disrupts God's blessing (without fault)

What about my addiction, my anger, greed, bitterness, dishonesty? Surely those things condemn me (without a single fault)

Colossians chapter two says that on the cross, Jesus took your record and died to pay the penalty you deserved to pay! If you stand in Christ by faith, you are forgiven, clean, blameless, and holy (set apart) for Him!

Paul says it this way!

"Think about the things of heaven, not the things of earth. For you died to this life, and your real life is hidden with Christ in God." Colossians 3:2-3

Your real life is hidden with Christ in God... What is true of Christ is true of you!

On the cross, Jesus not only took your imperfect record, He gave you His perfect record of obedience and faithfulness. So that when God sees you, he sees the flawless character and nature of Jesus.

Application:

When you finally understand who you are in Christ, you can then live out your life in Christ with freedom, confidence, and joy!

So...as we prepare to close, I want to give you two steps to take in the weeks ahead to help you set your sights on Christ!

#1 – Pursue Jesus

The Christian life is a relationship...

When we struggle to believe...when we have a difficult time trusting. When we are having a hard time growing, the tendency is to place more and more burden on ourselves. When, in reality, what we need is a clearer view of Jesus.

“If only the blindfold could be taken away from our eyes! If only we could see Jesus in the fullness of who he is and what he has done. Why then, surely we would see how worthy he is of our wholehearted allegiance, and faith, love, and obedience would be drawn out of us, and we would grow into maturity. Nothing is more important for mature Christian discipleship than a fresh, clear, true vision of the authentic Jesus.” John Stott

Do you want to grow – as a man or woman...in honesty, purity, joy, self-control. Do you want to be a more kind or generous person! Do you want to see a relationship heal, your marriage strengthen, to grow as a parent?

The way you’ll really grow is to love Jesus more!

“And now, just as you accepted Christ Jesus as your Lord, you must continue to follow him. Let your roots grow down into him, and let your lives be built on him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness.”

Colossians 2:6-7

We can make the Christian life about a lot of things –worship gatherings, small groups, volunteerism, spiritual activities, generosity...all of those things can be very, very good...But you can have all those things and not have a vibrant relationship with Jesus Christ...it’s possible – no heart, no joy, no peace...

Scriptures – They tell us about Jesus...his character, nature, qualities...

Summer – God-breathed – texts to help lead you through the Word of God...to give you a new, renewed picture of Jesus.

#2 – Pursue Jesus Together

Body of Christ – Bride of Christ – in this together...

Fix Your Thoughts
Part 4: Setting Your Sights on Jesus
June 28th, 2015

Walk with friends who will direct you toward Jesus

Walk with friends who you can direct toward Jesus. There is someone in your life who needs reminded of who Christ is, and of who they are in Christ!

Colossians 3:4 – One day, God will fully complete what He started!

PRAY