

WHAT ARE YOU THINKING?
COLOSSIANS 3:1-4

What we think is important.

I don't mean that our opinions about various topics are important — they may or may not be important — but that *what* we are thinking about in any given moment *is* important. The millions of thoughts that travel around our six-inch diameter gray matter every day do matter. Those thoughts form our desires and they inform our decisions and guide our actions. It might be true that “you are what you eat” physically, but it's even more true that we are what we think. How we live is the product of how we think. Our actions are the result of our thoughts. What we think is important. In his book, *God's Battle Plan for the Mind*, David Saxton says,

“Perhaps the best advice I could offer someone who desires to become a stable, godly person of meditation is this: turn off the television and fight the temptation to be an entertainment-dominated person. The wholesale surrender of the mind to the world's programs and amusements led R. Kent Hughes to bemoan, “This cosmic potential of the believer's mind introduces the great scandal of today's church: *Christians without Christian minds*, Christians who do not think Christianly.” [134]

This morning I want to ask the question, “What are you thinking?” That's a good question in general, but it's a great question for this season of Covid-19 — what are you thinking about potential illness and death, and job change or loss, and financial pressures, and economic downturns, and relational struggles? What are you thinking about your life circumstances in Covid-19?

This message relates to and builds on last Sunday's sermon from Proverbs 1:7. Last week I said that for the believer, *to fear Yahweh is to worship Him by delighting in Him and obeying Him*. We want His fellowship and we want to serve Him. Fear of Yahweh is personal. It is worshipful. It is humble. And it is servant-hearted.

How can we cultivate hearts that fear the Lord in a way that honors Him? Colossians 3, without using the word “fear,” informs us how we can honor, revere, and delight in the Lord. It begins where all sanctification begins — with a renewed mind, thinking and meditating on the provisions of God. I summarize the opening verses of **Colossians 3:1-4** this way:

PREOCCUPATION WITH CHRIST AND HIS PROVISION FOR US WILL TRANSFORM OUR PERSPECTIVE ON LIFE.

Let's get to the meaning of these verses by asking three questions:

1. What Do You **WANT? (v. 1)**

- ✓ God provided for you in the **PAST**
- ✓ Align your **DESIRES** with God's provision

2. What Are You **THINKING? (vv. 2-3)**

- ✓ God is providing for you in the **PRESENT**
- ✓ Align your **THOUGHTS** with God's provision

3. Where Are You **GOING? (v. 4)**

- ✓ God will provide for you in the **FUTURE**
- ✓ Align your **LIFE** to God's provision

These questions will help us align our thoughts to God's thoughts and our actions to God-fearing actions.

1. What Do You WANT? (v. 1)

• God provided for you in the PAST

- ✓ Paul connects this verse to the things that he has already said in chapter two with **therefore**. He is drawing conclusions and making application of the truths he has exposed in chs. 1-2, esp. **2:12, 20**.
- ✓ Both **2:20** and **3:1** begin with the conditional word, **if**. But this particular structure is a reality for every believer, so we can give it the sense, “since” — because we have been crucified with and **raised up with Christ**, we ought to desire and pursue things and live life in particular ways.
- ✓ Paul is talking about the same truth of our union with Christ that we saw in **Romans 6:4, 8-10**. Because we have been identified with Christ, His righteous life is imputed to us and we are freed from sin and freed (and enslaved) to His righteousness (**Rom. 6:20, 22**).
- ✓ Through union with Christ, sin and death are dead and we can do things to please the Lord.
- ✓ We have a new relationship with Christ, we have a new relationship to the Law, we have a new relationship with life — we have a new life. And Paul repeatedly reminds us of this reality.
- ✓ One theologian has catalogued what happens instantaneously for the believer at conversion:
 - In the eternal plan of God
 - Redeemed
 - Reconciled
 - Related through propitiation
 - Forgiven all sins
 - Joined to Christ
 - Freed from the Law
 - Made a child of God
 - Adopted into God’s family
 - Made acceptable to God
 - Justified
 - Brought near
 - Delivered from darkness
 - Translated into the Kingdom
 - Placed on the Rock
 - Made a gift to Christ from God
 - Spiritually circumcised
 - Made a partaker of the priesthood
 - Chosen
 - Given heavenly citizenship
 - Made members of God’s household
 - Given fellowship with the saints
 - Made a part of a heavenly association
 - Given access to God
 - Made a recipient of God’s abounding grace
 - Made a recipient of an inheritance in Christ
 - Made a recipient of an inheritance in heaven
 - Made a light on God’s behalf
 - United to the Trinity
 - Blessed with the deposit of the Holy Spirit
 - Glorified
 - Made complete
 - Given possession of every spiritual blessing
 - Made a recipient of eternal life
 - Given victory over sin
 - Given eternal security
- ✓ He then comments —

“As all these blessings indicated, salvation is a work of God for man, not a work of man for God. What a Christian experiences is what God’s love has prompted Him to do for those who had no merit before Him but who are now recognized in the merit of His Son because of their faith in Christ. The truth of the riches of divine grace are most overwhelming, and it is difficult to give it proper recognition.” [Walvoord & Chafer, 2: 148.]

- ✓ In a similar way, Richard Sibbes said, “We are only poor for this reason, that we do not know our riches in Christ. In time of temptation, believe Christ rather than the devil. Believe truth from Truth itself. Harken not to a liar, an enemy and a murderer.” [*Bruised Reed*, 61.]
- ✓ This verse is a reminder of our riches — the blessings we have in Christ, our Savior.
- ✓ We have this union with Christ, but what is the benefit of that union? How do we apply or live it?

- **Align your DESIRES with God’s provision**

- ✓ Because we have this position with Christ, Paul says we are to ***keep seeking the things above***.
 - The ***things above*** are the things that relate to Heaven — it is to desire the place that Jesus is preparing for us (In. 14:2); it is to seek our ultimate home (2 Cor. 5:8); it is to seek ***Christ***. We want Him and the things He represents. It is to seek everything consistent with Christ.
 - When he says ***keep seeking*** he is talking about pursuing something. He is talking about orienting our lives to the things that are ***above***. It is desiring what Christ desires. We are living for and pursuing and desiring the things that will last in eternity (e.g., Mt. 6:10, 19-21, 33).
 - And notice that he says ***keep seeking*** — that’s a present tense, which means this should be our habitual or continual activity — in everything we do, we should pursue heavenly desires.
 - He exhorts us to do this repeatedly because it is our tendency to stop seeking God and to seek our own desires and our own righteousness — we are “prone to wander” from God, Christ, and Heaven. In fact, in the previous verses, he identifies some kinds of wandering — legalism, asceticism, and self-righteousness (2:21-23). Instead, we should seek what God values.
- ✓ *Why* should we seek the things above?
 - Because that’s where Christ is. He is ***at the right hand of God*** — He is reigning in Heaven with unrivaled prestige and authority, and all things are in submission to Him (Ps. 110:1; Col. 1:17f).
 - Because all things are under His control, more than just wanting Heaven, we want *Him*. We want fellowship and union with Him. Our quest is not just for a place, but for a Person — Jesus Christ.
 - We should seek things associated with God and Heaven and Christ because only they endure.
- ✓ *What* does ***seeking the things above*** look like?
 - It means to look at *people* (selfish shoppers and gracious givers) and *events* (like Covid-19 and lost jobs and plunging financial markets) through the eyes of Christ, with an eternal perspective.
 - It is to see God as sovereign over circumstances (which means we are content and restful) and people as opportunities for evangelism and discipleship (which means we are gracious).

- It looks like the story Warren Wiersbe told of two sisters who liked to live a party lifestyle. And then they were both saved and redeemed. Shortly after that, they received an invitation to a party from some pre-conversion friends. They sent this brief RSVP — “We regret that we cannot attend because we recently died.” Their desires had been transformed to God’s desires.
- ✓ In the middle of Covid-19, what are our desires saying about us? What are you wanting today? An end to restrictions? A haircut, a movie, and shopping? Healthy stock markets? Corporate worship?
- ✓ We say, “we do what we do because we want what we want...” To change what we do, we must begin by changing what we want. And changing what we want begins by seeking the things above.
- ✓ Today we *all* need some heart examination:
 - What do I really want? What are my longings, priorities, passions, and desires?
 - Are my desires heavenly desires? Are they worthy of Christ? Are my desires consistent with the life He gave me and are they consistent with His reigning influence in my life?
- ✓ There is a second question that helps us evaluate whether we are preoccupied with Christ —

2. What Are You **THINKING?** (vv. 2-3)

• God is providing for you in the **PRESENT**

- ✓ Paul calls the believer to think a particular way in v. 2 — but notice first the two reasons that the believer is to think that way (**v. 3**) —
 1. **for you have died...** This reiterates what he said in v. 1 and in 2:12, 20. No additional dying is needed. Christ’s death — and our present identity with that death — are adequate to conquer our battle with sin today. We are now (already) victorious over sin (when we submit to Him).
 2. **your life is hidden with Christ in God** — we are safe and secure. We are in union with God. We have fellowship with the Son. We are secured by the Spirit. We are not yet perfect, but we are still safe. We don’t need to worry about our security. We are kept (e.g., **Jn. 10:27-29**).
- ✓ Notice also that we are hidden **with Christ** and **in God**.
 - Our position is **in God**. We have a common life with God (e.g., Jn. 17:22-23; **2 Pt. 1:4**).
 - We are made safe **with Christ** — alongside Christ. We are as safe in God’s protective hand as Christ is safe in God’s hand. Because Christ is in God and safe with the Father, because we are in Him, we also are safe. “The life of the believer is already a heavenly life.” [O’Brien]
 - We live on earth, but our life is already in Heaven. We are already in the company with Christ. We don’t have the fullness of our heavenly fellowship yet, but we have the fullness of our heavenly security with Christ. Cf. **Eph. 1:3, 20**.
- ✓ Whatever trials we have on earth, whatever burdens we carry, we are secure when we are in Christ.
- ✓ What should we do with that reality? Verse two tells us —

- Align your THOUGHTS with God's provision

- ✓ The verb **set your mind** is a favorite word of Paul's (23x of 26x in NT). It means to think, to form an opinion, or to have an attitude. It is an inner disposition. It's our heart — as in v. 1 — our desires, longings, motives, thinking, will. It's to have an inner disposition towards God and Christ.
- ✓ "You must not only *seek* heaven; you must also *think* heaven." (Lightfoot)
- ✓ And as in v. 1 (**seek**), this is a present tense — *keep thinking* (because we are prone to stop).
- ✓ This is a reminder that there is an intimate connection between the way we think and the way we live. We will do what we think. What we think is the way we will live. And if we want to be sanctified in our loneliness, in our fear in the present, anxiety for the future, depression over the past, anger over loss, or bitterness over injustice against us, then our thoughts must change.
- ✓ We will never change what we do until we change the way we think. And we must not just think, "Stop doing ____." We must have thoughts focused on **the things above**: our priorities and thoughts need to be aligned with God's priorities and thoughts. We need to think the way God thinks. "Our feet must be on earth, but our minds must be in heaven....the practical everyday affairs of life get their direction from Christ in heaven." [Wiersbe]
- ✓ To align our thoughts with things above, we must also **not set our minds on things that are on the earth**. Paul is not saying we shouldn't be concerned as stewards about things on earth. He is not saying the physical world around us is unimportant — Paul is not a gnostic, saying all physical things are bad. But he *is* rejecting the priority of the world. He *is* rejecting the morality of the world. He is saying we need to stop acting as if Heaven is temporary and earth is eternal.
- ✓ We get a hint at what he means when he uses a similar phrase in v. 5 — **what is earthly in you**. There he is talking about the earthly things that need mortifying — sinful activities that have no part in the life of the believer: immorality, impurity, passion, etc. So Paul is saying we need to stop living for the world and all the things the world prioritizes. We need to live for God's priorities.
- ✓ And that change in living begins with a change in thinking. And that means we need to feed our minds things that are heavenly and not earthly. And we won't find what is heavenly on ESPN, Fox News, CNN, HBO, or Netflix. We won't find that on unseemly websites or in lurid novels.
- ✓ "No Christian, however pious, will ever grow [spiritually] if he feeds his mind on trash..." [Gaebelein]
- ✓ When we struggle with fear, anxiety, loneliness, depression, anger, worry, and a host of other internal sins, it is because — at least in part — we are focusing more on what is earthly and less on what is heavenly. We are thinking more about what we are losing on earth than what we will gain in Glory. We may be feeding ourselves Scripture, but as much as these sins overwhelm us, we aren't allowing the Scripture to shape our thinking, our desires, and our actions.
- ✓ While I have a great longing for us to be rejoined in corporate worship, I am also grateful for what these days are teaching us and exposing in us. This is "100-year-storm" that is revealing what is inside us and what thoughts and desires need to be changed.

- ✓ To that end (only!) I am not in a hurry for this to end. Woe, that we should come out of this situation unchanged and untransformed. Oh brothers and sisters, dare we ask God to change our hearts, desires, and thoughts in these days?
- ✓ One simple test: For every thought or desire, we do well to ask, “is this heavenly or earthly thinking? Is this God-honoring or worldly-informed? Is this life-thinking or dead-thinking?”
- There is one last question to ask to evaluate whether we are pre-occupied with Christ —

3. Where Are You GOING? (v. 4)

• God will provide for you in the FUTURE

- ✓ Paul has spoken of Christ’s past provision, His present provision, and now he speaks of Christ’s future provision for the believer.
- ✓ **When Christ...is revealed** — there is coming a day (soon!) when the fullness of Christ’s authority will be manifested in His second coming. The veil over our eyes will be removed and we will see Him in all His glory and be transformed into His likeness (1 Jn. 3:2; 1 Cor. 13:12; Mt. 17:1ff).
- ✓ Not only will Christ be revealed, but what **you** are in Christ will also **be revealed** (1 Thess. 4:17-18).
- ✓ Paul doesn’t tell us the date of that day, but he does tell us the certainty of that day. We have a confident hope that our redemption will be completed. We will be made holy and be in the presence of God in Heaven (1 Pt. 1:7-9). This is our certain hope and our great treasure!
- ✓ Again, “We are only poor for this reason, that we do not know our riches in Christ.” [Sibbes]

• Align your LIFE to God’s provision

- ✓ Since we have this coming confidence that we will be redeemed, Paul also reminds us that **Christ is our life** — He is the totality of life, the sum of life, the object of life, the purpose of life (Phil. 1:21).
- ✓ Christ gives us life, but even more, He *is* life. We don’t live for this life, we live for Him (Gal. 2:20).
- ✓ One way that Paul emphasizes this is he repeatedly uses the title **Christ** (4x) in these verses — the fullness of life is only experienced when life is focused on Christ.
- ✓ The battle cry of the one whose life is oriented around Christ is: “for me to live is Christ.” Our attitudes, ambitions, and outlook on life are molded by our relationship with Christ. Our allegiance to Him takes precedence over every earthly allegiance.
- ✓ Is that true of you? Do your checkbook, your daily schedule, your conversations say, “Christ is life?”
- ✓ Or in Covid-19 do your fear, anxiety, loneliness, anger, and resentment say, “This world is life?”
- ✓ We have only this one life; let us lose it by living for Christ above all, for Christ alone.

CONCLUSION: We've asked three questions about this text this morning. How did you do?

In life and in Covid-19 —

- ✓ What do you want?
- ✓ What are you think?
- ✓ Where are you going?

And how are your answers to those questions shaped by your identity in Christ and the glorious riches God has for us in Heaven? Oh friend, be so wrapped up in Christ and so heavenly minded that you become of greatest good on earth. Pursue heavenly desires so you can accomplish God's purposes for you until you get to Heaven.

What are you thinking? Think on the riches of Heaven, the purposes of God, and the glories of Christ.

BENEDICTION: Ephesians 1:18-21

*Remember Zoom Meeting Room for fellowship after the service,
and someone will be at GBC from 1-2 p.m. today if you want to drop off checks.*