

Life Transformed

Colossians 3

Prior to Sermon: We have Beginner's church for 3 and 4 year olds, so if you are a parent that would like some age-appropriate teaching at this time, you can take your child out to that area, which is right next to the Entrance 2 doors.

Pastor Brian is on vacation, and he has asked me to speak to you this Sunday in his absence.

Introduction: Some of you in here are tired. You have had a long week. Students, you have studied for nine months now. You are almost to the finish line. But many of you have some more tests and projects to go before you are done. Some of you teachers might be thinking – I have been teaching those tired students for nine months. How do you think I feel??? And those of you who aren't students or teachers – you can relate – perhaps you are faced with a challenging situation that seems a little overwhelming. Or maybe you are in a position where the goal seems just a little out of reach. Maybe it's at your job when you have 60 hours of work and only 40 hours to do it. Or you are at home facing 12 hours of solo parenting before that little one finally goes to bed. What do you do? Some might have a tendency to do something like this. It's at this point you might have a little pep talk with yourself. You try to motivate yourself to be better than ever. Ever heard these phrases before? "Dig Deeper." "Believe in Yourself." "You Be You."

Since we all face difficult challenges, a common conclusion to those problems is often presented. The answer to overcoming difficulties in life is *you*. *You're* the answer. Our culture highlights, promotes, and celebrates ourselves. You are the key to your success in life. Never change who you are. Live for you. Our culture encourages a high view of *our* worth and *our* abilities.

When faced with difficult circumstances or a trying time, does the Bible give this same advice? Not at all. It *never* gives this advice. In fact we get the opposite advice.

God wants change – from you. God wants you to grow. He doesn't want you stay the same. He wants to transform you, and, well, transformation is a radical process.

Jesus doesn't want you to believe in yourself. He doesn't want you to dig deeper inside of you to find what you think you need. He wants you to follow

Him! He wants you to trust in Him. We fail. We make mistakes. We are often deluded into thinking that we can win at life if we believe in ourselves.

If you want to grow and develop as a follower of Christ, then Jesus has better thoughts for you.

Take your Bibles and turn to Colossians 3. If you don't have a Bible, there is one near you in the racks under the seats.

Let's Read Colossians 3:1 - If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.

Seek the things that are above.

Paul, the author of Colossians, begins this chapter with a specific purpose. I love how he draws in his listeners. He identifies his audience. They are the ones that are risen with Christ. "If then you have been raised with Christ" Paul begins his chapter. Who is His audience? Well, if you are risen, you used to be dead. He is talking to people that were once dead and are now alive. He is talking to people that were once controlled by sin but they are now born again. His audience are followers of Christ. And if you know Jesus, you are "with Christ." At first my eyes sort of glossed over that phrase before I recognized that there was some serious truth here. You are "with Christ." When I got married to Melissa, I was "with" her now. We belong together. So a child of God, a believer belongs to Christ. You are "with" him. Can I just say – be impressed by this. Be energized by this. Being "with" Jesus is not a station you or I deserve or have ever merited. So if you are "with" Jesus, what Paul has to say next should really matter to you – because he is about to give the game plan – the instructions – to those on Jesus' team.

Paul says "to seek the things that are above." That word *seek* has the idea of focusing, desiring, endeavoring to go after something. And Paul zeros in on what that something is that we should seek. He wants us to seek the things where Christ sits. Christ sits in heaven. Paul wants us to seek heavenly things. I hope that you at least see that our gaze has been shifted from looking at us to looking up. We don't see a concern to dig deeper to do better in life. The focus lies squarely on Jesus.

Transition: But seeking the things above can be a little nebulous, right? Does it seem a little fuzzy and leave you scratching your head a little? A little

undefined. What does it mean really mean to do that? What does that look like in my life? God, in his grace, does not leave us hanging to figure this out.

If Paul lived in 2018 and was talking to us, he might have said, “Slow down for a minute! Hear me out. Cherish the things of Jesus. You people at FBC, you are dead to all that earthly stuff. You follow Jesus now! You are with Jesus.”

What does Jesus call us to if we are “with” him? Let’s read the next few verses, starting with vs. 3 and reading down to vs. 17.

So if you are “with” Jesus, he has asked you to do two big things. The first is to...

Kill sinful practices. Sinful practices is what the Bible calls the “old self.” Sin and seeking the things above have nothing in common.

Illustration: Let me give you an example. Many freshmen in college don’t have cars. I was one of those freshmen. If you needed to get somewhere, you looked to try to bum a ride off of someone who had a vehicle. Sometimes that meant you would get in a car with people you don’t know very well. One day around the end of my first year at school, I ended up sharing a ride with another freshman. I didn’t know him very well, so I asked him how his classes had gone. He told me sort of sadly that he had missed five questions. I asked him what he missed those questions on. Maybe he had a bad quiz or something. I could relate to that. I had bad quizzes all the time. Then he told me he had missed five questions *that year*. As in, his freshman year, that’s all the questions he had ever missed – in all his classes – combined. I realized then that he and I were most likely not on the same plane intellectually. He went on to earn a doctorate at Yale and then a PhD at Princeton, and now is a professor at another Ivy League School. I took a slightly different path academically. He and I were on completely different wavelengths. He and I would never be confused if we were in the same room.

Seeking the things that are above and sin are completely different things. And you can’t do both. They can’t be confused. They have nothing in common. And God’s Word tells us that when sin enters into the picture of your life, you are to kill it. Crush it. Annihilate it from your life. Using those types of strong words paint a vivid picture. Those are pretty harsh measures, and it is for good reason.

I am convinced that one of the reasons that many struggle in their journey of following Jesus is an acceptance of sinful practices in their lives. The continual allowance of sin pushes against and distorts the believer’s focus on God. Do

you know what I am saying here? If you’re trying to seek the things that are above, those things that you ought to kill but rather allow in your life push and shake and can topple Jesus as the one you gaze upon. That sin will claw its way to the top. So Jesus says – kill it.

Why put it away? For the follower of Jesus, it isn’t you. If you are repenting of your sins and believing in Jesus, you have been made new. Remember, the new self – it’s made in the image of God – and it is not called to the lifestyle of immorality, covetousness, lying, anger, and evil communication. How you live and how you think and speak – your life is hidden in Jesus.

So...Embrace the identity of Jesus. This is the “new” self. There are a few things that are mentioned in this passage that highlight this. We will only have time to touch briefly on a few of these areas.

Care – Can I sum up all the words of verse 12? Embracing the identity of Jesus means that you desire to have compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience. It means that you *care* for one another. It’s the elevation of the needs of others over yourself. Cultivate and nurture these qualities, FBC. We see these things most perfectly in Jesus Christ. *This is seeking the things above.*

As you embrace these qualities, as you labor in caring for one another, can I tell you what will happen? You will begin to react with care and compassion. What is fascinating is how Jesus reacts to certain situations. Probably one of the most monumental reactions in Jesus’ ministry is found after Jesus hears that John the Baptist has been killed. Jesus grieves and leaves on a boat to be alone; but the crowds follow him. When he comes back on shore, tired, worn, and grieving – he sees the crowd.

Matthew 14:14 - When he went ashore he saw a great crowd, and he had compassion on them and healed their sick.

Then he miraculously provides the crowd a meal as well. He reacted, even in a moment of distress, with care. It’s a reaction that displayed the heart of Jesus.

I wish we had time to look at more Jesus’ reactions – they were moments often bathed in difficult circumstances – but Jesus was always looking to care. When we embrace the identity of Jesus and desire to care, our reactions will reflect what our heart believes.

When does care stop? When the focus turns away from Jesus and others and on to ourselves. When we expect others to take care of our needs because we are deserving of it, caring stops and you elevate yourself instead.

Embracing the identity of Jesus means to care and to...

Forgive – Brian accurately and wonderfully taught us what it means to forgive others in his forgiveness sermon series a few weeks ago. I would invite you to listen to those messages if you weren't here to listen to them. Part of embracing the identity of Jesus is recognizing what it means to forgive. And the motivation Paul gives to forgive is rooted again in the perfect example of Christ.

If we want Jesus' forgiveness, we have to be ready to forgive others. And when I realize what Jesus has forgiven me of – my sins, my rejection of him, my unfaithfulness to him – I realize that his forgiveness has no limit. Do we grasp the concept of unlimited forgiveness?

Our flesh grows weary of continual forgiveness, right? My patience runs thin when my two little boys choose not to follow our teaching to obey their parents. I call to them to come to me, or to clean up their room, or to put on their socks and shoes to go outside. And they stare at me and run the other way or decide that request from dad isn't worth following.

Then I remember that I am a lot like my boys. Jesus extends his call to follow him. And I stare back, deciding if it is worth it to do what Jesus asks. And then how often do I choose to think or say to Jesus – you aren't worth following right now.

Yet Jesus' forgiveness doesn't wear thin towards his children. He offers it again and again. He desires to reconcile our relationship many times over. Embracing this type of forgiveness towards others is embracing the identity of Jesus. This is seeking the things that are above.

Love – We are called to love each other – something the Scripture in verse 14 describes as being more critical than anything else.

Romans 13:9-10 – (The) commandment(s), are summed up in this word: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

This is an FBC heart statement - Since loving people is our greatest expression of our love for God...We will work and desire the good of others above ourselves.

We can love each other without hesitation because only good can come from loving each other.

Love holds things together through the complexities of life. When good, joyful times are plentiful, love rejoices in that. But when difficult times come, true love will hold strong. Often when a loved one sins against you, love is able to overcome the hurt. It holds you together. We know this to be true because it is evidenced in what God did through Jesus.

Romans 5:8 - But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Hopefully you are seeing now, that you are to embrace what Jesus embraced. Care. Forgive. Love.

Do It Together – A transformed life doesn't happen alone. God, in his incredible wisdom, puts us together in his church with godly people that can speak truth into our lives to give us more clarity in living a transformed life that focuses on things above. *Don't discount what happens together*. So understand that Brian's sermons help us focus on things above. Realize that when you are singing - that those words point us to the heavenly things. Recognize that the teachers in your Sunday school classes for your kids and your teens and adults are assisting you in killing sinful practices and embracing the identity of Jesus. When your child participates in Awana or when your teen participates in youth group, God's word has an opportunity to dwell in your son or daughter's life. And when you serve together in ministry at FBC, you live out Colossians 3:16-17.

Colossians 3:16-17 - Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

When you hold fast to Christ's church and the desire to focus together on embracing who Jesus is, you are hiding your life in Christ.

These things are turning the focus off of yourself and focusing them on Jesus above. The transformation in your life begins when you embrace Jesus.

God wants change. There are some things he wants you to put to death in your life.

God wants change. There are some things he wants you to put on.

Practically speaking, how do I know I am really seeking the things above – killing sinful practices and embracing the identity of Jesus?

Let me give you something that will hopefully illustrate this to you and help you understand if you are really seeking the things above. Think about something that you have a strong passion for. There are some of you that are passionate about sports. You have a drive to compete and to win. You will work it in practice; some of you practice after practice is over! You will strive to get better, get stronger, and get faster. You want to win. When you get knocked down, you will get back up and get right back in there. That's a wonderful thing. I love seeing the determination and the will to fight. There is value in promoting those qualities. There are some of you that are passionate about your family. Perhaps you are passionate about your kids. You would do anything for them. You love watching them learning, and growing, and succeeding. If you saw someone bullying or hurting your child, you would consider that the beginning of World War 3. Perhaps you have a passion for learning a certain subject or hobby. You read, you watch videos, and you practice your craft over and over again. You enjoy the challenge. And to you, a morning out hunting, or an afternoon reading or learning about your favorite thing – you can't think of too many things better than that.

Melissa will tell you, I am passionate about my sports teams. I will cheer when they score a touchdown, I will get nervous when they seem like they are losing, and I will sink to my knees and miserably ask "Why did you do that?" when a boneheaded play happens. I will read articles about my team. I will spend money on a hat, shirt, or a ticket to a game. If someone comes up and asks me about my team – I will without hesitation launch into conversation. Some of you can relate to that.

So listen to what I am about to say - Your pursuit of those passions should give you an idea of how you should pursue embracing the things above. A striving and a desire to embrace the identity of Jesus. A determination that when one of those sinful practices knock you down, you get back up and keep following Jesus. You heart's desire is to serve Jesus and nothing will get in the way of that

– not even those other passions you have. Because those other passions that you have – those should serve you in understanding what it means to be caring, forgiving, loving, and doing it together with your church.

If seeking to be like Jesus seems a little farfetched to you or a little out of reach, realize that might be a good thought. This seems out of reach for me. I can't do this. And this doesn't stop – you must always keep killing sinful practices. You must always keep embracing the identity of Jesus. It is a constant renewing. This is when we need God's grace every morning. We need God's good work in us every day to pursue Jesus like this. This is a God-fueled endeavor, not a you-fueled endeavor. But realize, brothers and sisters, that if you know Jesus, you are "with" him. You are close to the power of Jesus, and he will work to mold and make you like him.

Conclusion: My hope is that seeking the things above isn't nearly as fuzzy as it might have seemed before. I hope that Colossians 3 has provided clarity to you in realizing what it means to put your minds on things above – care; forgive; love; do it together. Thinking back to the beginning of our time together, can we rearrange the thoughts that we originally heard? Those ideas of digging deeper, believing in yourself, and you being you.

Well, instead of...

Dig Deeper → Seek the things above
Believe in Yourself → Trust in Jesus
You Be You → You embrace Jesus

When your gaze leaves yourself and embraces Jesus, he transforms your life by his good work.

That's God's Word for us today. Don't forget there are Sunday School classes for all ages after this service. The meeting rooms will be on the screen.

If you have questions about what it means to seek the things above and Colossians 3 or you would like to pray, I will be up at the front at the conclusion.

Let's pray.