

Sunday 20th February 2022
Colossians 3:1-14
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Let us take a moment to pray before we think about God's word. Let's pray:

Holy Spirit, breath of God, come soften our hearts to the word of God.
Holy Spirit, come and reveal truth that life and freedom might flourish.
Come Holy Spirit with power and deep conviction, for we ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.

I wonder if you can think of someone either living or deceased who, to you, embodies Jesus? Can you think of someone whose character, whose life, whose faith just meant that they shone Jesus to you? If you're sitting next to someone why not for the next 30 seconds just turn to them and see who comes to mind for you. Over to you for 30 seconds.

Well, feel free to pick up those conversations afterwards and maybe I think that the weather's a little bit less windy than it was so maybe, afterwards, outside you can also see who else came up with different ideas and I would love to hear the names and the folks that you thought of. I'm sure I've got some similar ideas to you but actually some ways, what's more upon my mind, is how did they get like that? How did they grow in such a character, in such a way that they embody Jesus, that you noticed and that you remember? There's another thought that I wonder about also, could it be that you, me might be there one day? That someone might look at us and see Jesus in us? Could the next generation see Jesus in you already?

And our passage today, Paul continues to build on all that he's written in chapters one and two, his great prayer for the Colossians, of Jesus and Jesus is supreme over all, this Jesus that Paul seeks to make known, the commission that Jesus gave to Paul and so, he's right into the Colossians, to strengthen and safeguard their faith from these false teachers, from this false avenue of worship. But now, going into chapter three, things change. He's beginning to now say 'Well, if this is who Jesus is, if this is who you have faith in, and it's a real faith, and a genuine faith, then there should be a way of living a lifestyle that is congruent with that, that should accompany that faith. But even then, Paul is going to have a few surprises for us. Surprises that make Christianity different from those false avenues of worship and, as he's done throughout this letter. he's going to get the Colossians to look up to Jesus but also so that they can see the truth about themselves as well.

And so, he writes in the first portion 'You have been raised with Christ who is seated at the right hand of God. For you died and your life is now hidden with Christ and God when Christ who is your life appears then you also will appear with him in glory.' And, as is typical of Paul, he fits enough into four verses that really could do with four sermons but you're not gonna get that thing instead, I'm gonna give you my best summary thoughts of what I can condense this down into and it's this - you share now in the future Kingdom of Jesus, you share now in the future Kingdom of Jesus. But let me explain where I got that from in this these verses.

There's two people on display, there's Jesus and there's the Colossians, so, what's the picture of Jesus here? Well, he is named Christ which is not His surname/ It's not His

surname, it's His title. He is Jesus the Christ, the Messiah in Hebrew and that was a promised figure who would come to bring God's Kingdom and to bring salvation upon the earth. And He is now seated at the right hand of God, which is biblical language, picture language, for saying that salvation He has accomplished. He's not working and laboring at that. He has accomplished it so, he is seated. And He is seated at the Father's right hand, He's seated at the throne of God. And all this picture language of Jesus is showing us that that He is King, He is King of a Kingdom and although we don't experience that fully yet, He has broken into this world in His coming. But notice what else it says of Jesus 'when Christ appears.' He's coming back. He's coming back to bring the fullness of His Kingdom into the creation. Created order, that's a picture of Jesus.

So, what's the picture of the Colossians, we have here? Well, they have been raised because they have died, and we touched on this in previous sermons, that they have died to old masters, as chapter 1 verse 13 said, they have been brought out of the dominion of darkness but they've been raised with Christ, they have been brought into the Kingdom of the Son, the Kingdom of Jesus and so their life is now heading up, wrapped up in Jesus and in His Kingdom, and it doesn't maybe look like that sometimes but that is what the truth is. And so, it goes on, here's your life and then you also will appear with Him, when He appears you will appear, when His Kingdom comes you will share in that Kingdom, you will share in the glory of that Kingdom. And so, we get the summary phrase 'you share now in the future Kingdom of Jesus.' He is the King of all, as we saw in chapter one, He's supreme and He has a Kingdom and you share in that Kingdom. It's so crucial to biblical theology. It's so crucial to the writing of the scriptures. It's so crucial to this very passage. Is it crucial to your life? Does it shape your life day-to-day, week-to-week, year-on-year? Does it shape your purpose and your values? Does it shape your living and your choices? Does it shape the confidence you have as a Christian? You're not just a member of the Church of Scotland, which is declining. You're part of the Kingdom of God and one day that's all there will be.

But really Paul is just echoing the teaching of Jesus. If I was to ask you to say what is the Gospel, what would you say? What is the good news? Would you come up with the same answer as Jesus. 'Jesus went into Galilee proclaiming the good news. (the Gospel) The time has come, the Kingdom of God has come near.' Now, that's not to deny that the Gospel includes the cross, or faith in Jesus, both of those are essential if you want to share in the Kingdom of God, but the Gospel is about the Kingdom of Jesus. That's the Gospel!

Two years ago a few months before the pandemic struck we had an end of year all-age service just at the end of 2019, hopefully you might remember back to that and that you were there, we asked you a question and gave you some post-it notes to write on - is this jogging any memories now - and on the way out you were asked to post it, post up your post-it notes and we would collect them in and we were doing this as part of our purpose and values - and if you don't know what they are check out our website - now on the day we got 150, 200 plus post-it notes and the question we asked you was 'What is important to Jesus?' and we got answers ranging from the Bible to prayer, to church,

to people, to love, to forgiveness but guess what wasn't there, not one posting - the Kingdom of God - not once, not one. Now, why is that?

Let me say, I don't think it's your fault, I don't think it's your fault. If anyone is to blame for that scenario happening, it lies with the ministers, generations of ministers who've not taught that. Not just me, not just Murdo and Scott, but generations before that. That maybe we ministers have been so wrapped up by our culture, our individualistic culture, that we have focused so much on the individual, and not focused on the Kingdom, not focused on the fact that so much of scripture is addressed to our community, not just to an individual, or we get so wrapped up in the institutions and the congregation and the parish and, to be honest there ain't anything of that in here! It doesn't seem like God really cares much for denominations or a parish system or whatever/ It might be His focus is on the Kingdom, on unity. There is no them and us as Paul says in verse 11 'Christ is all and is in all Christ.' is all that matters and He is in every person who calls himself a Christian.

But, wherever the blame lies, can we change our thinking now? Can we go forward from this point now, much more shaped by a Kingdom mindset so that it does affect our day-to-day life? Because, if we don't, we'll hit a barrier a glass ceiling or maybe not even a glass ceiling, a very solid ceiling of faith both individually and together because, without that theology of the Kingdom of God rooted deep in us, shaping our mindset, shaping our lives individually and collectively, we won't have the right outlook on faith or life and we'll just hit a ceiling. It would be like a barrier where the plants have just got a barrier over and they can't flourish and grow and they just grow inward. Your faith, our collective faith, will just grow inward without that framework of the Kingdom of God. It's so important to the scriptures and it's so important to this passage, because Paul goes on now to say well if that's true of you, if you share now in the future Kingdom of Jesus, there's a lifestyle that goes along with that.

And so, he goes on to say 'Put to death therefore whatever belongs to your earthly nature. You must also rid yourselves of all such things as these. You have taken off your old self with its practices.' Again, there's a lot in here and these three strands seem to again have a similar thought to them and I would summarize it this way - cast off what is not fitting for Christ's Kingdom, cast off what is not fitting for Christ's Kingdom. Because here and in the later verses of the same passage, he uses this picture of clothing that is or is not fitting for the Kingdom of Jesus and here he's saying to cast it off. I'm pretty sure at one point I've told you that Gill and I got invited, when I worked with the Scout Association, to the Queen's Garden Party in Holyrood, at Holyrood Palace. Lovely day, thankfully it didn't rain and everybody's getting really glammed up and there was Gil looking fabulous and hat and everything on, and there's me less fabulous and my Scout uniform, now I did have my kilt on so we better dash of color, but imagine if we rocked up there and t-shirts on 'Down with the monarchy'! I'm not really sure that would have went down so well, it would have been scandalous, it would have been an absolute mockery of things, it would have been ill-fitting. And the same is true with our lifestyle, with how we live our faith. There is a faith, a lifestyle that is fitting as

someone who belongs to the Kingdom and there is a lifestyle that is ill-fitting and Paul wants us to put to death what is ill-fitting.

Now, because that makes us uncomfortable, we often shrug it off, we want to look at the positive rather than the negative, but we need to grasp the more negative and to help us do that I want to very briefly read out three analogies that I picked up in my reading because they between them they grasp some of the what is Paul is getting at here and what differentiates what Paul is teaching, what the Christian faith is teaching from those other false avenues of worship and the three pictures are: the house; the well; and the cage.

The house - When you ask God into your life you think He's going to come into your inner house, look around and see that you just need a little cleaning and so you go along for the first week while thinking how nice life is now that God is part of it, then you look out the window one day and to your horror you see a wrecking ball outside. It turns out that God actually thinks your whole foundation is shot and you're going to have to start over from scratch.

The well - A Tennessee farmer once said 'What comes up in the bucket is usually what's down in the well'. The list of vices Paul gives points to an inner pollution. No list of do's and don'ts will ever change that pollution, the only solution is to change what is down in the well of our very souls.

The cage - The false teaching Paul opposed put the wild animals of lust and hatred into cages, there they remained alive, dangerous, beating at the bars, threatening to get out and capture their captor again, Paul's solution is more drastic - the wild animals are to be killed. The old method of holiness attacked symptoms; the true method goes for the root.

Paul's not really teaching a list of do's and don'ts, he's much more interested and you've been changed from the inside out, been changed in the depths of your being so that what is fitting for the Kingdom grows and exudes from you, that when people see you, they see Jesus, and we could spend literally sermons on this thought as well, but I don't have the time and so I want to refer you to a resource that I found helpful not only on this particular topic but on several others as well. It's a book by Timothy Keller called 'Prayer' and he's basically bringing together his research and his life over many decades of ministry to say this, this is what I found useful and in that he has a chapter on finding the grace of God, the grace of God, and in it he talks about how you can put to death the sinful nature your earthly nature and what he writes in there is fresh and life-giving and really helpful. The whole book is great but even just for that one chapter it would be worth having a copy. Now, if you don't want to particularly buy it I'm happy to lend out mine so first come-first served and you can take it away today. Because Paul is serious about this. We really do need to put to death what is ill-fitting so that we can grow in that lifestyle that is fitting but, as Keller writes, it's finding His grace to forgive yes, but grace also to change. As we saw in our last series, our series on Grace before the summer last year, Grace is also in the scriptures synonymous with God's power,

God's power to transform you, power to change you. But to access that power there first has to be something else that comes before and I briefly just want to touch on this because if you want to access this power you first need to be, need to have died and be raised to life as Paul says or in the language of Jesus, you need to be born again.

Now, some of us are going to say 'Well, I didn't have a clear conversion moment, Scott, so how do I know?' and many people can say that, but they still know with certainty that they're a Christian, that they have died and been and raised to have life in Jesus. Because none of us is born a Christian, coming to church doesn't make you a Christian, being baptized or being a member doesn't make you a Christian, the only thing that makes you a Christian is that you have died and been raised with Jesus. So, how can you know, how can you know with a degree of certainty and encouragement?

Well, what I've found really helpful in discerning this is Paul's writings in second Corinthians and he says in chapter 5 'and he (that is Jesus) died for all that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.' and what Paul is saying is that, someone who has died and been raised to have life in Jesus within them, as a desire to no longer live for themselves but to live for Jesus. Now, none of us gets it right perfectly, even the minister had a very clear conversion experience and I'll go into some detail on this in a moment, he doesn't get it right, go ask my wife, every day there are issues, but at the core of a Christian should be that desire for this to be true of their life, that they don't want to just live for themselves, they want to live for Jesus, and increasingly so. If you can say that's true of you then you know you have died and been raised to life, and if you haven't, and if that's not there, there might be reasons for that. I'd happily talk that through or maybe we can ponder it at home on our own, because, if you desire to live for Christ rather than just for yourself, if you have died and been raised to life then you share in Christ, you share in His Kingdom. And so, because of that, there is a lifestyle that is fitting and unfitting for that and God wants to help us grow in that by accessing His power, accessing His grace. So, that's putting to death what's ill-fitting and first accessing the grace of God by knowing that we're in Christ.

So, how can we put on what is fitting and what does that even mean 'to put on what is fitting'? Well, Paul says 'set your hearts on things above set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.... you have put on the new self which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator therefore clothe yourselves' That middle sentence I have practiced it so much because they just trip over it quite easily, it's a bit tricky there. And there's two things I want to highlight for us.

'Earthly things' - first of all I think it's very possible that we could read this and get the wrong end of the stick with Paul because when you think of earthly things on a first read we might begin to wonder well is Paul talking about some form of escapism like have I not to be bothered about what I wear, or am I not allowed to enjoy a glass of wine, or company with friends, or the chocolate bar? What is it that he means like by 'focus your minds and hearts on things above and not on earthly things'? Like, what is that about? And for me, what helped this week, was to realize that in verse 2 'earthly things' there's

a Greek phrase used there, 'earthly things' that's the same Greek phrase in verse 5 for 'earthly nature'. So, in verse 5 Paul is saying there's this part of your earthly nature that is opposed to God, opposed to the will of God, that is ugly and just wrong, that's your earthly nature, but earthly things in chapter verse 2 is just the same phrase and it's the same thing. So Paul is not against you enjoying life, he's not calling you to be so heavenly minded that you're not involved in the day-to-day of life or not enjoying the day-to-day of life, that's not what he's about, ultimately he's about saying that we need to change from the inside out about what we think about, what captures our hearts, that it wouldn't be these earthly wrong things but other things, the good things of God, that he's given us, that the good things in Him, the good things of His will.

And so we have the second phrase saying that we've to be 'renewed in knowledge in the image of its creator' and until this week if you'd asked me 'What does that mean Scott?' I probably would have waffled some nonsense, I'm pretty good at that not always maybe convincingly, but I can waffle as good as the next minister probably, but until this week, I had not a clue really what that meant.

But this week, I had an experience on Monday that I'm about to tell you and then in the midst of that I also happen to be researching and trying to understand the scriptures and the two came together and I'm just so excited to share what I got because I just find it so life-giving that God's just perfect timing brought those things together! So, on Monday, Gill comes home from visiting her parents and she shares with me the news that her dad had spilt milk on her phone such that and left it for a while, I might add, such that that the earpiece of the phone wasn't working properly. Now, she has a nice new iPhone not the brand new one it's a couple of years older I think, but it's pretty good, it's not a cheap phone, and inside me starts bubbling a whole range of emotions. I didn't say anything but my mood, the vibe I was giving off was a bit prickly, a bit moody, We term it, Gill and I, my passive aggressiveness which it is, it is passive aggressive. I don't vent so I don't go into a rage as Paul says but there's this just exuding of my passive aggressiveness and at first Gill thinks 'He's annoyed.' I'm annoyed at her that this has happened, but we've kind of learned to work through conflict, thankfully, over these many years of marriage, and we've got to that point so we talk it through and I say to her 'Well, I'm not annoyed at you, what actually is going on is I'm worried. I'm worried about finances. I'm worried that here's more that we're going to have to fork out for and cost of living crisis and all, that just amalgamation of things and worried, and so my worry has generated this passive aggressive prickliness.' We kind of talked that through but at the same time I'm reading up about this verse and this passage and it just jumps off the page with fresh life and just spoke to me because what I realized was this, my passive aggressiveness, my prickliness, came from my worry over finances but my worry was a sign that I didn't trust my Heavenly Father didn't trust His love and provision because, if you think about it, let's go to Jesus, did Jesus ever show passive aggressiveness? No! He showed anger, injustice but not passive aggressive and that's because He never worried and He never worried because He was perfectly trusting in the Father's love and provision. And so, for me, what I've realized is, that I need to have my mind renewed, my understanding of God and His character, of what it means to be His child, so that I don't worry, and, the next time her dad spills milk on the phone, which

is bound to happen, then I'm going to respond in a more Jesus-like manner with gentleness and kindness and 'Oh, that's grand. No worries.' whatever it might be, I have no idea, but it won't be passive aggressiveness. I'm not there yet and there'll be many more days of passive aggressiveness I'm sure, but I've realized this. But it all starts in the mind and being renewed in your mind of what you understand of God and of His character and of His will. And the same is true of the sin and of the lack of Jesus image in your life, of all the ways that you show what's here or in the other scriptures, where you're not showing Jesus or you're going against the will of God. It all starts from what needs to change in your mind, and I want to give you just a few quick worked examples based on the passage.

So, chapter verse 5 Paul says 'put to death your earthly nature' which includes sexual immorality and I don't know what that brings up in your mind but just to let you know what the scriptures teach, that sexual immorality is sex outside of marriage. Now we can debate and discuss that at another time but sexual immoral immorality, sex outside of marriage is the thing that's the outward product. What is the thinking that leads to that? It's either you don't understand the Biblical teaching about sex and where that is to be experienced marriage, or you think you know better than God. And so, well that's something that needs to change in your thinking too or something else maybe around temptation on and how-to walk-in God's ways in the face of temptation. There could be a number of things in your thinking that need to change so that you walk in God's will, and on the outward product is not sexual immorality anymore.

Let's take verse 11 where Paul is talking that 'there's no longer Jew or Greek and Jew or Gentile' and there should be no division. There should be no Brightons or Slamannan, Brightons or Polmont, Brightons or Maddiston Evangelical, there's nothing of the Kingdom because what needs to change in our mind is that as verse 11 says 'Christ is all and is in all' Christ is all that matters. The Bible doesn't give a jot about denominations. So, that needs to change in our thinking so that we have a much more Kingdom outlook and then we evidence greater unity and less about them and us and that we're all one family wherever we're based.

Or let's take verse 13 where Paul talks about bearing with each other forgiving one another 'forgive as the Lord forgives you.' Now, let me first say that there are some elements of forgiveness, some things that are done to you that require a lot more nuance than I'm going to give just now and forgiveness can sometimes be a lengthy process, I've been there with some things, and they're not even the worst things that you can experience. So, please bear in mind that, there's lots of caveats around this. But it's not uncommon for people in churches to experience stuff that peeves you off and so you just get really annoyed and you end up having a grievance against someone but then you don't forgive and that grievance becomes bitterness. We've all probably been there. That stems, in part, there's a process there and maybe that's what you need to understand, the process of reaching forgiveness, but in part it can stem from thinking you're better than the other person. So pride or not understanding that actually you were an enemy of God and yet He died for you so if He's willing to extend you forgiveness why are you not willing to extend that other person forgiveness? There's so much that

could be wrong in our thinking or just not formed in our thinking, that is in line with the scriptures that on the other hand we end up displaying just bitterness and unforgiveness. You could do that with everything in here, lust, evil desires, idolatry, greed, everything stems from something that needs to change in our thinking so that, in us, has renewed the image of Jesus,

And I pray, church, that we would really take this on board. Take this on board so that our today's generation sees that the Christian faith is not about just ticking a box and coming to church, it's not about even being a nice person, it's about knowing the living God whose grace you know, whose grace is at work in your life, such that you're changing and you exude Jesus in your day-to-day life, because you're part of His Kingdom and the grace and power of His Kingdom is at work in your life and you're then embodying that Kingdom by casting off what is not of it and putting on what is.

I pray that that would be our testimony, our story and that we would share that with today's generation. May it be so. Amen