

Hidden with Christ - Baptism Sunday, August 25, 2013

Through the summer, I've been teaching on the somewhat challenging relationship between God's grace and His demand that we be committed to holiness. I hope that as we've looked at what the Bible describes as holy living, we will see that as part of His grace to us.

The next passage that we will be looking at is Colossians 3 and we'll get into that in detail next week. Today I want to look at the first four verses of this chapter as an introduction to the testimonies of those who will be baptized this afternoon in the Alouette River.

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. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

This comes in the middle of a fascinating series of teachings about dying and living again. In the previous chapter, Paul says that since the believers have a new life in Christ, they should continue to live in Him. Then, in v. 12 of chapter 2, he says that those who are baptized have been buried and raised again with Christ. Then he writes that we were dead in our sins, but God made us alive, with Christ, and forgave all our sins. In verse 20, he says that the believer has died with Christ to man-made rules and regulations, which seem to have religious or spiritual value but which don't really make any difference.

Now, in chapter 3, he starts to talk about what will make a difference. Before we look at verse 1, I want you to notice Paul's big emphasis in the verses of chapter 2 that we just looked at. Over and over he repeats the phrase, "in Christ" or "with Christ". This is the identity of the Christian, a person who has chosen to identify himself or herself with Christ, with Jesus, with His sacrifice and with His resurrection. This is what sets us apart from the world as Christians and, as we'll now see, it is what gives us the power to change, to live a new life.

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. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

The image of death and rebirth into a new life that we saw in chapter 2 related to baptism is appropriate to this passage as well. As you come out of the water, you are being raised with Christ. You are embracing the life that He gives, life that never ends, even with physical death, and life that is full of joy and purpose.

But the counsel that Paul gives here is crucial to the path that you will walk in the future. Any one of us can get stuck with our focus on ourselves, on our circumstances, on our old habits, the things about our old life that captivated us. Paul says two vital things: "Set your heart on things above, where Christ is" and "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." Set your heart, or your affections, the strong desires that guide what you will do with your life -- set your heart on things above. Be passionate about what lasts forever and what is linked closely to Christ Jesus. Then, "Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things." This is a spiritual discipline and if we practice it, it will produce dynamic spiritual life within us. Think about the things that are eternal, that are blessed by God, that are good and true and bear fruit.

When you're in a really sane moment, unaffected by the constant noise of the world around you, you can easily see how worthwhile, how joyful, how satisfying your life is when you are living gratefully, living in response to God's love, living with the purpose He has given you. But the world is always trying to drown that out, to keep you from thinking about God's mercy to you, to keep you from the joy and the gratitude that should be anchoring your life.

The world comes with the latest fear on the evening news, with the latest unexpected bill, or with the phone call from the emergency room at the hospital. But more often it comes at us in boredom, in a selfish desire that isn't getting met, in a restlessness with life or a hunger for something that you hope is out there, but you're not sure how to get it. And your focus shifts to the here and now, to the emotions that betray you, to the unsatisfied longings. When your focus shifts from the things that are above, from the life that is hidden with Christ in God, it turns inward, becomes self-centred, perhaps becomes afraid or lonely or depressed.

There are many things going on in this world that can and should make you depressed. Nice thought, eh? But you are not a citizen of this world. Your life is hidden with Christ in God and your citizenship is in heaven. You always have hope and a reason to be grateful and to experience deep inner peace. Since you have been raised with Christ -- and I say this today especially to those who will be baptized this afternoon -- since you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above, where Christ is . . . and set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. If you really believe God and really trust Him, you know that He will carry you through. And when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. What will all the frustrations and fears that this world inflicts on you matter then, when you appear with Jesus in glory?