

Christ is your life

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[0 : 00] In the movie Shawshank Redemption, it follows Andy Dufresne, a banker wrongly convicted for murdering his wife and her lover and sentenced to life at Shawshank State Penitentiary.

Eventually, he got released from prison before completing the full sentence because he, as a librarian, had demonstrated good behavior.

But what no one expects, the tragic thing, is that escaping from prison was not the powerful and transformative experience that Brooks had hoped.

So, after spending over 50 years in prison, he finds it overwhelming to do simple tasks like using a payphone. He had gotten so used to the structured routine and sense of purpose he had in prison that he felt aimless, despair, and disconnected from the public.

Life in a confined environment where one is completely stripped of any agency seem much simpler. On one gloomy afternoon, Brooks climbs out to the ceiling of his apartment and hangs himself.

[1 : 35] Now, the truth is, friends, we often find ourselves in a similar identity crisis, don't we? We've all heard the message that Jesus sets people free.

He gives them a new identity. Yet many of us still find a comfort and pool of old habits hard to resist. Whether you're someone still exploring the Christian faith or someone who's been walking with Christ for years, it is easy to slip back into the familiar patterns that once defined us.

Like Brooks, who long for the familiarity of prison walls, we too can struggle to grasp what true freedom looks like.

Does Jesus truly offer us a new life? Can he really set free those who are bound certainly on many days our lives do not live out to this reality?

When it comes to the tension between salvation and the sin that lingers, we often swing to one or two extremes. We either grow skeptical, thinking freedom in Christ is impossible, or we convince ourselves, I'm already free.

[2 : 55] There's nothing more I need to do. So how should we navigate this tension between the already accomplished salvation, but the not yet finished sanctification?

How do we honestly acknowledge that we are still a work in progress, never perfect, yet genuinely pursue a life that honors him day by day?

Now the answer lies in our text today. Please turn with me to Colossians chapter 3, verse 1 to 4. Now it didn't hit me till 10 minutes before the service that my script is still in ESV, so I will try my best to adapt to the NIV, but the slides, however, will be in ESV.

So if any of you still have physical Bibles, then I'm sorry for the inconvenience, but if you do, you can switch to the ESV. That would be easier so that we are on the same page.

Colossians chapter 3, verse 1 to 4 reads, Now there are six main statements in this verse.

[4 : 30] Now can we go to the next slide?

If you see this, there are three of these statements declaring what is already completed. If you are in Christ, you have died.

You have been raised with Christ, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. And so we'll study today's passage by examining, number one, the completed reality, number two, the coming reality, and number three, the commanded response.

Let's jump in. Number one, the completed reality. Now we begin with our completed reality in Christ. By grace, through faith, three things characterize the reality we live in currently.

We have died, we have been raised with Christ, and our lives are hidden with Christ in God. Now let's look at them one by one. First, we have died.

[5 : 54] Now what does that mean that we have died? Friends, you are dead. Now if we go back to chapter 2, verse 12, Paul says that we have been buried with Christ.

Of course, this doesn't mean that our physical bodies are buried, but that our old self, our flesh has been crucified. One helpful verse that explains our death is Romans 8, verse 7.

For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God. For it does not submit to God's law. Indeed, it cannot. Those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

So when I died, my hostility to God died. My unwillingness to submit to God died. And my inability to please God died.

And in chapter 2, verse 13, we learn how all of us were utterly dead in our flesh. So the bad news is that in me, there was an old Pauling who wanted nothing to do with God.

[7 : 03] This old me had to die so that the new me may come alive. The good news is that in Christ, it did die. When I was 17, I had a friend who just the night before was at my farewell party as I prepared to head to the U.S. for college.

But the very next day, she became unconscious. And I remember how those last days before leaving Malaysia were terrible. As the teenage me tried to reconcile my friend's sudden suffering from a brain tumor.

I watched as the church prayed for her and as her family struggled with whether to keep her in a vegetative state. And a week after her arrival in the States, she passed away.

From halfway across the world, I read the Facebook status of friends and family relieved knowing that she was no longer bound by the thing that brought her so much pain.

Likewise, when we are dead in Christ, we are no longer bound by the sins and the losses and the desperation that once causes so much suffering. Just as my friend was free from the pain of her illness in death, we too are free from the sickness of sin.

[8 : 23] In Christ, my old self, with its enslavement to sin, has died. And in its place, a new self has come alive.

That is what verse 1 means when it says that all of us who have died in Christ have also been raised with Him. Again, we go back to chapter 2, verse 12-13, which says, we were raised with Jesus through faith in the powerful working of God.

And that God made us alive together with Him. Now this means two things practically. First, because we have been raised with Christ, I have a new law.

Romans 7, verse 6, but now we are released from the law, having died to that which held us captive, so that we serve in the new way of the Spirit and not in the old way of the written code. So because I have risen with Christ, I no longer look to the law for my salvation. Instead, through the Spirit, Jesus lives in me so I can walk in the newness of life.

[9 : 32] So I have died to my old way of salvation. But the second thing is that I am alive to righteousness. 1 Peter 2, verse 24 tells us, Christ died on the cross so that we may die to sin and live to righteousness.

Though sin is very real, and sin remains a temptation, it no longer has control over us. Of course, we are reminded daily of our depravity.

How many of us say irrational things every day to our spouse? How often do we have lustful, bitter, and anxious thoughts that fill our hearts?

How often does sin threaten to keep us in despair? And maybe that's you this morning. I don't know what kind of week you've had. But today's verse reminds you and all of us that you are raised with Christ.

This means that, yes, I should grieve my sin. I should grieve the damage it causes to me and my community. But no, sin doesn't have the final say.

[10 : 46] Many wonderful marriages wouldn't have existed if sin had the final say. My sins have already been crucified. And my new self is driven by love and righteousness.

My professor in seminary used to work, one of my professors in seminary used to be in the Navy for 20 years. Now, you know, when you're in the Navy, you go, yes, sergeant.

No, sergeant. When the sergeant comes at you, whatever he says, you listen. Now, my professor has since retired.

But when he sees the sergeant in the grocery store, if the sergeant barks an order, guess what? Everything in him is inclined to listen to it.

And that's the reality with us in it. You see, sin will bark its orders at you. But you have died with Christ. You're risen with him. You are no longer under the rule of sin.

[11:50] And thus, the final part of the complete reality is that my life is hidden with Christ. Now, why does Paul say this? Why didn't he just say, you have died and have been raised?

You would think that would be sufficient enough to convey the death and resurrection in Christ. But I think Paul means this as encouragement. Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

You see, our life in Christ, though very real and very secure, is not yet fully revealed. That's what hidden means.

in Colossians 1, Paul declares that Christ will present us holy and blameless. Thus, the fullness of our identity in Christ is something that is gradually revealed over time.

Romans 8 says that the entire creation groans as it awaits the full revelation of the sons of God. 1

John 3 states that as children of God, what we will be has not yet be made known.

[12:59] But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. A day will come, friends, when we are completely free from the corruption of sin.

And when we fully display God's glory, our life is hidden with Christ because all of us are on a journey towards the full realization of our new identity.

So, although we may experience many blessings from God in this world, it is a reminder that our true life is not here yet. As C.S. Lewis beautifully puts it in the weight of glory, it is a serious thing to live in a society of possible gods and goddesses to remember that the dullest and most uninteresting person you talk to may one day be a creature which, if you saw it now, you would be strongly tempted to worship.

Now, notice, none of these completed realities are commands. There are not things to do. You don't have to die yourself.

You cannot do anything to rise with Christ. These are not commands. these are realities that are already done. There is nothing we can do to make this first part more of a reality than it already is.

[14:30] God has already accomplished this on our behalf in Christ. The danger of false religions lies in their teachings that often suggest that Christians need to perform certain acts or exhibit specific signs to make their identity in Christ a reality.

even Christians can be tempted to think that, oh, I only truly die in Christ on my good days when I have everything under control, when my sin is curbed, I am a good witness at work, at home. or churches may enforce certain behaviors like achieving a level of spiritual enlightenment, like certain check boxes that you need to tick whenever you go to church so that these rules unknowingly imposed by churches and leaders give the impression that you can contribute to what has already been done.

that if you don't engage in certain practices like tithing, joining a Bible study, participating in social justice, going on missions trips, then your life hasn't really been raised of Christ.

The problem is that these teachings deny what is completed. They reject the finished work of Christ. All who are in Christ live in a completed reality.

[16:02] we have died with him, we have been raised with him, and our life is hidden with him in God. We're going to jump forward right now to verse 4 and look at the coming reality.

The coming reality. Now, just as sure as this completed reality is our coming reality, in Christ, we can confidently look forward to what is yet to come.

Read with me in verse 4. When Christ, who is in your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Can we look at the next slide?

Now, there are three main ways in which Jesus is our life. First, Jesus gave us new life. Keep continuing.

There should be one where I colored the verses. Ah, there it is. Wow. Okay. So, when Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

[17:15] Now, there are three main ways in which Jesus is our life. First, Jesus gives us new life. Paul writes in Colossians 2, verse 13 to 14, that Jesus is the source of our new life.

He has forgiven our sins. He has canceled the record of death that stood against us, nailing it across, and thus, we are made alive.

Without Jesus, then, there is no real life. Christ is the only reason we are spiritually alive. But second, Jesus is our life because he sustains our life.

John, chapter 15, verse 5, I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever abides in me and I in him, he it is that bears much fruit. For apart from me, you can do nothing.

Now, a non-Christian might produce things that appear to be fruitful, such as accumulating a lot of money, having a well-ordered life, enjoying a happy marriage, raising obedient children, gaining recognition from others, yet these seemingly impressive and beneficial eggs do not hold eternal value because they are detached from the vine, which is Christ.

[18 : 39] Faith in Christ depends on him to be our sustaining life. And third way that Jesus is our life is that he forms our life.

If we jump ahead to chapter 3 verse 10, we are told that our new self is being renewed in the knowledge of the image of its creator. This means that Jesus is actively shaping us into his own image.

So as we behold his glory and we seek to grow in Christ-likeness, we are inviting the Holy Spirit to work within us, gradually molding us into the image of Christ.

We confess our sins. We commit to follow Christ more closely, keeping our eyes fixed on Jesus and allowing him to enter every part of our lives such that gradually and sometimes painfully, he reshapes us according to his image.

Now this relationship between the completed reality and the coming reality is intimately tied to our belief in Christ. if you believe that the former, the work Christ has accomplished is true, if you believe you have died with Christ, you're raised with him, and your life is hidden with Christ in glory, then the latter is equally assured.

[20 : 09] If you cannot believe the first part and not the coming reality, these two are intricately connected. if you believe that you have died with Christ, that you will appear with him when he returns.

It's precisely because Jesus is the one who is our life, who gives us new life, sustains it, and continually forms us into his image that we can trust in the certainty of our future home.

Now friends, there will undoubtedly be days when you see the destruction your sin brings to your relationships and you begin to question the certainty of your salvation. There will be days when you are brought down by lies and accusations that the enemy hurls at you.

And there will be days when nothing in your life seems to be going right and you struggle to find your footing in anything you do. And those are the days when you may be tempted to think that this coming reality is not true anymore.

But the finished work of Christ assures us Jesus secures our future. And in him we can stand unwavering as we look forward to the glory that awaits us.

[21 : 34] In Christ we have a guaranteed coming reality when we will rise with him again. now here we must be careful to avoid a common thinking that arises when people realize that both the completed reality and the coming reality is guaranteed.

And we must be very careful here. Some people might say, well, since as you say, I will most certainly appear with Jesus in glory when he returns, that it doesn't matter how I live now, right? I can disobey Christ and I can still be with him in glory because didn't the preacher just say that no matter what we do, our life is secured in Christ?

that is obviously not true. Although our actions don't cause salvation, they confirm them.

Although our actions don't lead to salvation, they are fruits of our salvation. As 2 Peter chapter 1 verse 10 to 11 urges us, therefore brothers, be all the more diligent to confirm your calling and election.

[22 : 54] For if you practice these qualities, you will never fall. So the apostle Peter exhorts Christians to diligently confirm our calling and election.

In other words, a life that is truly in Christ will show evidence of that very salvation we already have in Christ. The sureness of our completed and coming reality informs the way we carry out his commands.

Let me say that again. You don't follow Jesus and carry out his commands to ensure the sureness of the completed and coming reality.

It is precisely because the completed and coming reality is guaranteed it informs the way you respond and live it out now. So here in verse 1 and 2, we are specifically then given two commands. Seek the things that are above and set your mind on things that are above. So that is the next slide. This is the commanded response. The commanded response.

[24 : 06] First, we should seek the things that are above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Now the word seek here entails a deliberate pursuit.

It's kind of a kind of craving, a kind of hunger for things that are above. Now, in English, to seek may sound like Paul is teaching that believers should try to acquire some kind of heavenly status as if it was something to be gained.

Seek the promotion. Seek the affection of that lady that catches your heart. but as we already saw earlier, that cannot be what Paul means here.

We don't need to strive for heavenly status as if it was something to be gained because it was already been graciously given to us in Christ.

So to seek cannot mean to labor to achieve some kind of spiritual enlightenment. It's that Paul's point is that Christians should keep Christ as our priority.

[25 : 19] That's why the second command in verse 2 seems to parallel the first. Paul tells us to set our mind on things that are above. Now this isn't just asking what would Jesus do in every situation.

Instead it involves a deeper fundamental orientation of our will towards heavenly perspective. Now some commentators believe that when Paul says do not seek the things that are on earth he is specifically referring to the false teachers in chapter 2 who are telling the Colossians to adhere to circumcision and Jewish food laws hence the phrase earthly things.

While I don't think that's the focus in this text the implication remains the same. Focusing on worldly concerns lead us away from Christ.

Instead setting our minds on things above aligns us with the values of Christ and his kingdom. To seek the things that are above is to allow Christ to reform our expenses, reform our entertainment, reform our character, and other areas of your life which Paul will go into more detail next week in Colossians chapter 3 verse 5 to 17.

But the premise is this, that when you seek the things that are above, there is something in you that fundamentally changes as you orient your heart towards Christ.

[26 : 55] love. Now the pastor used to share this story of a woman named Sally. Sally had the misfortune of being born extremely beautiful.

Even from a young age, Sally recognized the influence her physical attractiveness gave her. She had power because she looked pretty.

She used her beauty to manipulate others. others. But as time went on, others began to use it to manipulate her. And Sally reached a point where she felt powerless and invisible unless she was the object of a man's affection.

Could be her partner at the moment or somebody else. And the thought of being alone to someone as good looking as she was, was unbearable to her.

and that caused her to stay in relationships with men who were abusive. Now why would someone willingly subject themselves to such mistreatment?

[28 : 06] because Sally had come to depend on men for the deep affirmation and self-worth. She went and saw a counselor who advised her to find self-esteem through financial independence by building a career.

You need no man. You know, you can be a strong independent woman. But while she agreed that she needed to stand on her own two feet economically, she resisted the advice about finding self-esteem because guess what you're doing?

Quote, I was being advised to give up a common female idolatry and take on a common male idolatry. But I didn't want to have my self-worth dependent on career success any more than on men.

I wanted to be free. Well, how did she do that? She found Colossians chapter 3 verse 1 to 4. She learned that her true identity is hidden with Christ in God and she understood that neither man nor success should define her life.

Only Christ could be the true source, her true source of worth and identity. Now, does this mean that men no longer had power over her?

[29 : 34] Or that once she put her faith in Christ, she stopped struggling with seeking affection from men? Of course not. Sally had to continually seek the things that are above.

When faced with romantic interests, she had to remind herself that no man could ever be alive because Christ is her life. Only Christ could hold that place. Now, friends, I don't know what struggle you have this morning, what burdens you carry as you come to church this Sunday.

But there are many things in our lives where the men, success, recognition, affirmation from our spouses even, that seek to dethrone Christ from our hearts.

For some of us, younger ones, it might be our parents. We look to them for justice and fairness, only realize that their parenting will always be biased and always flawed.

For others, it might be our desire to impress people. We look to people's affirmation and validation to assure us of our success, only to find that those who support us when we're thriving are often the same ones who abandon us when we're left with nothing.

[30 : 56] See, Paul doesn't tell us to simply recognize these things that won't fill the hole in our hearts. It's that he offers us the true remedy.

What will set you free isn't a schedule change, isn't reading the right books, carrying the doing the right spiritual practices. It is to pray the gospel into your heart to see that only Jesus can be your true source of life.

When that happens, then your life will begin to align and fall in place. We must seek the one who is seated at the right hand of God, allowing his majesty and beauty, Colossians 1, to captivate us.

Only then can we truly appreciate and pursue other things in life without looking to them as our ultimate sources of fulfillment. See, friends, Colossians 3, verse 1, to 4, Paul has laid a powerful foundation of how we view our identity in Christ.

He has outlined the complete reality. He has assured us of the coming reality. And now, he has given us the command and response.

[32 : 14] Now, in next week's passage, you will delve deeper into what it means to set your mind on things above, specifically examining a transformation that occurs as you put off your old life and embrace the new life in Christ.

But for now, for today, we must see how the elements in the first four verses of Colossians 3 relate to each other. We must grasp that number one, our present and future reality is secured in Christ alone.

No obedience, no disobedience can take away the sureness of our salvation. But number two, we must then let this assurance in Christ prompt us to seek the things that are above, to set our minds on heavenly things, knowing that our obedience is not an attempt to save ourselves, but a response to His great love and what He has already accomplished first.

This doesn't mean that the things that you are entrusted with are not important anymore. You ought to be a good parent, a sacrificial spouse, a Christian who willingly witnesses and satisfies to the goodness of the gospel.

You ought to be wise with your finances, to have a good reputation in public, but none of these things are all your life. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you will appear with Him in glory.

[33 : 42] If Jesus is your life, friends, then seek the things that are above. Overt your hearts to Christ and let Him inform and transform aspects of your life day by day as He forms you into His image.

Let's pray. Lord, what a beauty, what a magnificent verse captured within these four verses.

Lord, we have only begin to look at the surface of these words. But what an encouragement it is to be reminded of the ways, despite the ways we fall short.

What has been accomplished and what is coming is sure and guaranteed. And we need not worry that our disobedience will cause us to lose our salvation.

But then we are reminded that there is a response as well. And Lord, we confess of the many ways we make other things our life. Like the last thing we do is make Christ our lives is often at the bottom of our priorities.

[34 : 58] But as we come before your word this morning, we pray that the gospel, the seeds of the gospel, will sow deep into our hearts that you will cause growth.

You help us to look at the things that used to define us, that continue to define us, and give us this new awakening of our reality, of new identity in Christ.

That when Christ is our life, all will be well, all will be secure, and let us then live the rest of our lives in the present, testifying to the goodness and sureness of our salvation.

In Jesus' name, Amen.