

Life with Christ
May 29th, 2014

Colossians 3:1-4
Ascension A

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For someone who has come to know their savior Christ, in other words, become a Christian, then the ultimate point of this life revolves around just one thing: your relationship with Christ. And though it seems to go by with a little less fanfare than say Christmas or Easter, the Ascension of our Lord Christ is at least equally important to those holidays when it comes to our relationship with Christ. The Ascension define our Lord Christ as he is now, right now, in our lives today. It helps us to understand how we relate to him now, what he does for us and who he is for us. As I've said to some of you here before, it's all well and good to think of Jesus as the humble man he was when he walked this earth, but if you want to think about Christ right now in your life, then the Ascension is where you have to look.

And the apostle Paul sums up your relationship with the ascended Jesus very nicely in our reading for this evening. As you consider the life you have with Christ, let's listen again to these words: <read text: Colossians 3:1-4>.

And if we're going to talk about your life with Christ we should start at the very beginning and most obvious place. The same place Paul starts in this section here. You have been raised with Christ. Notice that Paul is speaking in the past tense here. This is accomplished. We do know that someday, unless the Lord returns first, we will die and be brought back to life on the last day. But that's not what Paul is referring to. He's referring to the new life you were granted the day you became Christian. The day the Holy Spirit came to you through word or sacrament and gave you a saving faith in the Lord.

There's no two ways about it. You were dead before Christ. You were born separated from God and separated in a way that you had no power to reverse on your own. That's what death is, a separation that you cannot change. The only way to be with God is to be holy. And you were born unholy. Conceived and born in your own sin, you are not able to approach God. You inherited sin from your parents and wasted no time in making generous use of that selfish, sinful nature. As long as that sin is there, you are dead to God.

Christ came to change that. You were given life with Christ. He lived vicariously for you, in your place. He died, vicariously for you, in your place. The penalty of your sin was paid for and a holy life was credited to you. Just as he was raised to life on the third day, you have been raised to life through faith in Christ. You are connected to God in a way that you could not be before. You are a new creation, one where the sin you commit is not counted against you. You are made holy in the eyes of God, seen as the creation God made you to be.

And it is then Paul's encouragement to us here to live up to that standard. "**Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things,**" he writes (v2). Now that you know your savior and know what he has done for you, the rest of your life is about your relationship with him. It's a miracle that you do have a connection to Christ, and it is that connection that brings you eternal life. So again, as I said, the entire focus of our lives from the moment we become Christians, is on maintaining that relationship with our God. There are two factors to consider in this. One is how we strengthen that bond. Only God can do that for us, and he has only promised to do so through the Word and Sacraments. And so we make regular use of both. The other factor is how we can avoid damaging that connection. Sin damages our relationship with God and so the best way to keep our life with Christ solid is to avoid sin. And in a wonderful loop of sorts, it is again God's word that teaches us and strengthens us to do this.

We set our minds and hearts on our life above. Someday, each of us will be called to our heavenly home. When that happens we will leave the sin of this world behind and actually be perfect instead of just declared perfect in God's eyes. But what God is saying here is that we should *think* of ourselves as those people already. No, I don't mean think of yourself as perfect, you're not. But I mean, think of yourself as the person who, in Christ, doesn't let sin get the better of them. Who doesn't succumb to temptation because that is just not who you are. It is a call to action. To act as God sees you and to be the person now that you will one day be entirely.

You can only do this by God's power. And you can only do it right if you know how. For both, we need God's word. But we need more than that. We need help beyond ourselves, beyond our thoughts and our actions. Even if in God's

grace and power you were able to completely fight off all sin from this point on, and never give in again, that would still not make your life perfect.

We still live in a world of sin. We still must deal with its effects every day. From the sin of the people around us who lash out in hostility, to just the effects it has on this world in the disasters and decay of the world. Our own bodies turn against us. We need help. And this is where our ascended Lord shines. He is seated at the right hand of God. And he is ruling over this world for one singular purpose: to benefit you. No, not to make sure that you have a nice car and a big house and never get sick. To make sure that you are always on the path that keeps you with him on the way to heaven. He is completely in charge of every movement of this world, and he orchestrates everything to that end. For your eternal benefit.

That was the point of our Old Testament reading tonight. Perhaps you wondered what Haman and Mordecai and some assassination plot had to do with Ascension? It would be a little more clear if you could get the whole context of the story, but that would require reading most of Esther. I'd suggest doing that when you get home tonight. To illuminate things just a little better, Haman was a pompous court official who loathed Mordecai because of some small snub the man gave him once. Haman made a gallows 75 feet tall to have Mordecai hung with and was on his way to ask the king to put this man to death. Now look at how God arranges the events so that the king is thinking of honoring Mordecai when Haman shows up, how he asks the question ambiguously enough that Haman thinks the king is asking about honoring himself and in the end, instead of putting Mordecai to death, Haman has to serve as grand marshal in a parade honoring Mordecai. And at the end of it, what happens? The people close to Haman recognize that there's no way you can win against the Jew, because he has a living God who will watch over him.

You have the same advantage. Yes, there will be trouble. But there will also be plenty of help. It will be the path that leads to heaven, the path that keeps you closest to Jesus. And yeah, the more you try to fight staying close to Jesus, the tougher that path might get. I have heard it summarized best like this: God will give you enough trouble so that you do not forget you need him, but he will give you enough help so that you do not lose hope. Jesus is your ascended king, he walks with you every step of your life, he is with you all the way. When we remember this, we can remain contented and peaceful, whatever may come in this life.

And this life will have a good end. **"When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory."** That is the promised end. In this life we are better off with Christ, and in the life to come we will be with Christ completely. Glorified, just like him. Eternal, just like him. No more suffering or death or pain. If that's not worth looking forward to past all these annoyances in life, I don't know what could be. The life we live with Christ now is a deposit and a foreshadow of this glorious life to come.

On this Ascension day and every day for the rest of your life, don't forget your risen and ascended Lord Christ. He has made you alive in him. He has taken your life into himself. Live your life here with him, stay as close to him as you can manage so that you can be constantly assured of the only treasure worth having, eternal life with your perfect and loving savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.