



THIS CHANGES LIVES PART 3: THE WEIGHT OF CHANGE

TYLER VELIN | JANUARY 22, 2017 | COLOSSIANS 3:1-17

It took Google all of seven hundredths of a second to search the known world wide web and provide for my casual reading one hundred and eighty three million articles answering the question: "What is the meaning of life?"

This idea of life's meaning is important because if we can answer the question well, we can find a hope in our life. A hope that we can do something that matters, contribute to something that matters, or even find satisfaction in something which matters. And if we can answer that question, then we can have clarity on what we are to do with our life.

One of my wife's favorite laundry folding shows is "The Voice," this singing competition where the winner gets a record deal and a great deal of popularity. Every so often the show will feature a contestant and give a little video bio on who this person is. Typically their story culminates with something like this: "I've spent my whole life pursuing music. It's taken a toll on my family, my finances and my time. But to make it here will make all of it worth it."

Their hope provides meaning and purpose to their life. They hope to be affirmed as a star, and if that happens that brings merit and weight to everything they have done up until that point. It is a validation of their whole life having weight. The unfortunate thing is that only one person wins. The majority of these contestants don't receive what they hoped for, their life isn't validated by the declaration of the judges.

We've been working through a series on sanctification here at Sovereign Hope, and the same desire lies at the hearts of anyone who wants to change. We want to know that what we do in life will have meaning at the end. If sanctification, which means to pursue holiness, only ends up changing us without any sort of benefit or reward, then what is the true motivation behind it?

As we have discussed, change is hard. But the good news is that the gospel of Jesus Christ brings not only a motivation to change, but an assured hope at the end of our change. This is what brings weight to our sanctification. What we are going to see today is that: The certainty of our hope makes change meaningful and beautiful.

Paul is going to be our guide for this topic today in Colossians chapter three. And I want to open by reading the first four verses: Col. 3:1-4.

Perhaps you have heard this passage before, or at least portions of it such as "seek the things that are above, not the things that are on earth." And this sounds really good, but what does it actually look like in our life, and what does it have to do with how we are to change?

There are three important things I want us to note about this passage. The first is that it starts with the assumption that believers have been saved by Jesus. When Paul says, "if then you have been raised with Christ" he is tying everything that follows to the work that Jesus did on the cross to accomplish our salvation. This is huge, and something we have talked about before. Nothing we are about to read is doable unless we have been saved by Jesus. Jesus didn't come to improve our lives through behavior modification, he came to save our life through his death on a cross.

Second we see that our salvation has implications in the now: Colossians 3:2-3. Because we are saved in Christ, our lives are hidden with Christ, and therefore we should desire Christ. The immediate impact of salvation is

that it should change the desires of our hearts and minds.

And lastly it is important to see the future perspective that Paul provides here: Col. 3:4. This is one of my favorite verses in the Bible. You see a right perspective on your Christian life must include all three of these aspects: the past salvation that was accomplished, the current implications of that salvation, and the coming return of Christ where we see the true glory of our salvation.

One day, one glorious day, Jesus will come back. This is what makes our faith, faith. There is still something we hope in, still something that we must trust in. This hope is what brings meaning to our life. This is what Peter was talking about in 1 Peter 1:6-7. One day Christ will be revealed, he will come back. Peter ties every aspect of your faith, success, trials, and suffering to the coming revelation of Jesus Christ.

And to be honest, if our Christian life is lived without a present awareness of this fact, we will not live the way Jesus has called us to live. Paul starts with the future hope of the believer because he knows that hope brings clarity and meaning. If we want to view Christianity well this is lens we must use when we look at our life. The implications of the coming revelation and return of Jesus are monumental in our understanding and hope.

So we are going to take Colossians 3:4, and we are going to carry it's implications with us throughout the rest of this text. And what we are going to see is that the promise of Jesus' return exposes different motivations in our lives.

As Paul continues in his text we see the first of these: The Revelation of Jesus exposes the folly of men. We see this folly in the tension Paul creates in Col. 3:4-7.

We all live for something. We all hope for our life to have some sort of meaning in it. For some, this meaning is what drives them to religion, and for others, like the atheist Christopher Hitchens, meaning is simply found in the ability to enjoy momentary aspects of life.

But the coming return of Jesus reveals that there is a not cumulative grade you receive in life. We are enrolled in this life on a pass/fail basis. Regardless of what you think you ought to do, or what captivates, or even what compels, there are two and only two options your life will amount to: the coming glory of Christ, or the coming wrath of God.

On account of the resurrection of Jesus, glory and life are coming. On account of the sinful nature of men, God's wrath is coming. Inevitably each and every person who has ever lived will find themselves in one of these camps. You might think that you found a third option, or a loophole, but this is the inescapable reality that all men will face.

This reminds me of the old joke which says, "I heard a story of a man back home who fell from a 10 story building. Each floor as he fell people heard him saying, 'So far, so good.'" So far, so good. This is the mindset of a culture who believes the fall is safe because they have yet to find the ground.

It is man's inability to fully understand this truth that leads to the rat race of culture. From the Medieval times, to the Renaissance, to the Enlightenment, to Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism, Post-postmodernism, man has tried in varied ways and in varied times to find some sort of meaning in life and each attempt comes up gasping for air.

In just about every culture to have ever lived there exists this class of people defined as celebrities. They are the ones who are in positions of influence, who have wealth, power, and popularity. And yet don't you find it interesting that there has never been, even among those who possess everything, a consistent mantra on the good life? Isn't it telling that over the centuries we can now with great detail begin to describe the proofs of quantum physics, but we cannot answer the question of what satisfies us?

The Bible tells us that there is one way to find joy, life and meaning and it is only through the salvation that is

offered through Jesus Christ. That's what endures, that's what lasts, that's what matters. But we fail to believe it. This is sin.

The problem isn't simply that those who live in sin warrant the wrath of God, the problem is that their sin has blinded them to this reality. The only reasons, for both believers and unbelievers, that we would choose to set our minds on earthly things instead of heavenly things, is because we believe the lie of sin. We really feel like we can find joy, satisfaction, and purpose in other things. And for a moment we can find these things. The danger of sin is that it brings the flavor of satisfaction even if it never brings the substance of it.

But the urgency of this text is seen in this: what unbelief proves full in short, will prove short in full. What sin causes to flourish in brief, wilts with time. What the world holds out as life, the creator exposes as death.

Everyone is born into this facade. Paul says at one point everyone walked in this sin, everyone believed these lies. He says something similar in Eph. 2:3.

But because Christ came to earth, because on the cross Jesus brought sin to death, we can now be made aware of this. Paul gives us this hope when he says, you once lived in sin, but now you have died with Christ.

Having been raised with Christ, we can know the life of Christ. Having seen the realities of glory and wrath, we can with faith and repentance see that through Jesus we are no longer objects of wrath, but we are children of God.

This eternal change is where we see the beginning of present change. Let's continue in Colossians, but now I want us to see how the Revelation of Jesus exposes the labor of life. Look at how our salvation changes us: Col. 3:8-13.

Last week John preached on the task of sanctification and he helped us understand the offensive and defensive nature of conversion. We are to put off sin, and put on Christ. When you think of what you are called to do as Christian, what do you think about?

Sure, we are to evangelize, we are to worship, we are to disciple, we are to love. But I think sometimes we start too far downstream in answering this question. We overlook and ignore the primacy of holy living from the life of the believer. Look at the centrality the Bible places on living like Christ: Col. 3:11, Gal. 3:28, 1 Cor. 11:1, Rom 13:14.

We know that a right response to God is worship, but we must ask ourselves what our worship is? Paul answers this question in Rom. 12:1-2. The greatest acts of worship we can offer to the God who saved us is to allow the power of Christ's righteousness to change us to be more and more like him.

To preach the gospel endlessly without applying the gospel mercilessly to your own heart may be of some benefit to the hearer, but is of little benefit to yourself.

Look back at Paul's commands in Col. 3:8-13. Where do you fail at these things? Certainly we all fail in some way, and certainly we will never do all of these things perfectly. But I want to ask you, where is your fight for these things? Where is a burning sense of worship in your ability to put away anger, wrath and malice? Where is the active commitment to putting on kindness and humility?

I read a book recently which described the martyrdom of Japanese Christians in the 17th century. One of the ways these men were tortured was to have ladles of boiling water from a spring poured over their bodies. One of the officials tasked with pouring the water wrote to his superior saying that it was more likely that these hot springs would run dry before these believers gave up their faith.

What an amazing testament to the power of faith and the effectiveness of Jesus' salvation. We often hear of people who are murdered for their faith and we are faced with the question of: would I give my life for it. I

know in my own heart, the answer has always been, "Of course I would." Maybe you answer the same way.

But if we are apathetic to the commands to putt off sin and put on Christ, what gives us this confidence? If we are unwilling to give up harmful attitudes, hobbies, and humor, what makes us think we would be willing to give up our life? The faith of the martyrs is the saints daily task. To look and believe that Jesus really did change us. To look and believe that these commands are doable. To look and believe that these commands are for our good.

This is where Jesus' historic resurrection and future return means everything. Our final point this morning is this: The revelation of Jesus exposes our reward.

Look with me at Col. 3:14-17.

I love that verse. Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts. Isn't that in itself a beautiful reward? That we could really rest from the burden of this life because we have the peace of Christ. Isn't that the beauty of the gospel of Jesus Christ to a dying world? Come to me all who are weary and heavy laden and I will give you rest. I will give you my peace, I will give you my confidence. I will be your hope.

But here is the thing. Unless we really believe that this reward is the best reward, we will not be able to live rightly. To be satisfied by the peace of Christ, to be filled richly with the word of Christ, and to do everything in the name of Christ, we must see Christ as the greatest reward in and of himself.

This is what makes change meaningful. This is why the resurrection of Jesus, and the future coming of Jesus must be at the forefront of the Christian mind. This is why Paul beckons us to seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things that are above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Paul leads this section on Christian living by intentionally reminding the Christian what it means to live! To live is Christ.

In our struggle against sin we are faced with two choices: believe that what God says is whats best for us, what truly satisfies, or disbelieve what God says. If you want to win the war against sin in your own heart you must have a certainty that all of this effort is worth it. That it will all mean something in the end.

That is why this passage in Colossians is so beautiful because it ties the resurrection of Jesus to the return of Jesus. How can we have hope that it is better to put off sin even when it is hard? Because Christ has risen.

Christ has already proven that he is what endures past death. We can have hope that when all is said and done we will not have one ounce of disappointment in regards to a life of holiness because every drop of sweat, every fight over temptation, every early morning, every kind word, every prayer of repentance, every song sung, every sin destroyed will give way to the glorious life that Christ has given us in and of himself.

Because Christ has been raised the question of doubt never needs to be. Find me something or someone who has already proven his promise. Christ has taken a seat at the right hand of God. He has no more work left to do. Sin has been defeated, death has been destroyed. Life has been offered, change has been made possible.

And when we understand that we realize that there is nothing better in this life then pursuing that life. The question of what matters is really the question of what endures, and every life lived to the glory of God is a life which will endure forever.

Church, do not fall prey to the short sighted thought that this life is all that matters. For one day our life will appear, he will come back, and in that day we will appear with him in glory. And in that moment will you say, "that is what I expected." This is what made everything worth it. This is my joy. This is my meaning. This is my

Jesus.

And not until we understand the weight of that moment will we ever be able to set our minds fully on Christ. Dear church, the stakes are real, but so is our Jesus.

In this body we will have times of rapid spiritual growth, but also times of hard fought battles against sin. But our best hope, both for our joy and for the conversion of those around us, is the promise of change through faith and repentance in Jesus Christ. We fight now, knowing that one day Jesus promises it will give way to eternal glory. This is what validates our life, this is what brings clarity into our decisions, this is what brings endurance into our fight.

So let us see the stunning beauty of Jesus so that we might do everything, in word or in deed, in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.