

Ascension Life with Christ – Col 3:1-4

Introduction – For another Ascension Sunday, let us consider how important it is to remember that Christ has ascended and that we have ascended with Him.

Raised with Christ (v1) – Have you been raised with Christ, and what does this mean? We have been raised with Him in His resurrection life. We have been *“made-alive-together-with”* Christ (Eph 2:5). But being raised with Christ means more than that. In Col 3:1, Christians have been raised to *“where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.”* Again, in Ephesians, Paul says, we have been *“raised-up-with”* Christ and *“seated-with”* Him in the heavenly places (Eph 2:6). We celebrate Christ’s resurrection because we find our resurrection life in that event. We celebrate Christ’s Ascension because of the co-reigning that is ours – the living out of that resurrection-life – in that event.

New Life in Christ – We believe that we have been raised to new life in Christ even though we are still the same ol’ persons we were. In one sense, we look no different. This is something we hold to by faith and not by works. In the same way, we believe that we have ascended with Christ already in our union with Him even though it looks like we’re still in the same ol’ place we were. This also we hold to by faith and not by works. But Paul’s point is not that Christ is up in heaven and so we are up in heaven. The point is that Christ is in a position of the New Adam, the New Humanity, the New God-Man King over heaven and earth (Matt 28:18-20) and we share in that with Him. That helps make sense of the commands given to us in vv1-2.

Seek and Set Your Mind (vv1-2) – Some have taken these commands to mean that Christians shouldn’t concern themselves (at least not too much) with being excellent students, or the best in their business, or too committed to athletics or gardening or homemaking or anything “earthly.” But that is not what Paul has in mind at all.

The command is not to detach oneself from the world to find escape. Rather, because we have been co-crucified, co-quickened, co-raised, and co-seated with Christ, we can and must live as people who are united with Him in all His victory. Put another way, what we are commanded to do is to pursue, ponder, and yearn for all that we are in Christ as we live, just as Christ lived, in the midst of a sinning and suffering world down here. We are to live in such a way that we proclaim a crucified, risen, ascended, and reigning Christ. We are to do so when our nation is in an economic crisis. We are to do so when we are mistreated by others. We are to do so when we are tempted by the world and the devil. We are to do so when we see needs of others right before us.

The Things Above (v1-2) – Twice we are pointed towards *“those things which are above,”* and *“things above.”* What are those things? The context, the rest of the chapter, really shows us what Paul is talking about. You can read vv1-14 (and on from there) and see that the *things above* are the things we are to *“put on”* (v10, 12, 14), while *the things on the earth* are the things we are to *“put to death”* (v5) and *“put off”* (v8). All of a sudden, *“the things above”* are not pietistic, cloud-floating, wistful glories that have not yet been revealed. All of a sudden we find we are talking about real life, real relationships – the real struggles that are very, very daily in all of our lives. Things like tender mercies, longsuffering, and a forgiving spirit.

Put Off Because You Have Already Put Off – Notice that we are commanded to *“put off all these”* (v8) because we already have *“put off the old man with his deeds”* (v9). The picture is of someone who has been changed from the inside-out. He is a whole new person in his constitution and now he gets up because of that newness and takes off those old dirty clothes of the old man and puts on the new clothes of the New Man. We can’t clean up the outside in order to clean up the inside. Rather, because we have been transformed on the inside, we can be transformed on the outside. Because we have been raised with Christ, we can and must seek the things above.

Where is Your Life? (vv3-4) – To say you are a Christian is to say you have died. Another way to say this is that you have put off the old man (3:9). Another way to say this is to be baptized (2:12). The point is that your life is now in Christ and because of that Christ lives in you (Gal 2:20). That life is hidden with Christ. And where is He? *“But now, we do not yet see all things put under him. But we see Jesus...crowned with glory and honor”* (Heb 2:8-9). How do we see this? *“Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen”* (Heb 11:2). This is hidden with Christ but is revealed by faith and only by faith. But, and this is where we are invited to wonder upon a glory to come, *“When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.”* As sure as Christ ascended to heaven, so surely He will return (Acts 1:9-11). When that day comes, in all the glory that is the resurrection of all things, all things that Christ had been doing through His body will be revealed in all its glory. We will be permitted to behold His glory (John 17:24) and we shall find that we have become just as He is (1 John 3:2). The beholding will only be a prelude to sharing it (Rom 8:17), and this shall include a glorified body (Phil 3:21), fully conformed to the image of Jesus Himself (Rom 8:29-30).

Have you been raised with Christ?