

Colossians 3:1-4

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much, everyone who's participated in our service thus far. Thank you so much, Alice, for reading to us that great psalm of David. And you'll have heard that the prayer of David in that psalm is that God would lift his eyes to the, and the phrase is, the rock that is higher than I.

And that's what we want our prayer to be as we come to God's words this afternoon. So I'd invite you to turn to the book of Colossians. This is where we're going to be this morning. We're picking up where we left off. I think it was the end of November we left our series in Colossians, and we're picking it up at chapter 3 this morning. So please turn there and let's pray as we come to God's word together.

Heavenly Father, it is our prayer, Lord, because we know our own hearts and we know the things that distract us, that you would still us now and we would want to make the words of David in that psalm our prayer as we come to your words, that you would lift our eyes to the rock who is your son Jesus Christ who we've been singing about, who is higher than us.

And Father, it's in his glory saying that we pray these things. Amen. Well, whoever you are here today, I'd encourage you to listen in to the thing, the big message that these four verses in Colossians chapter 3 are going to tell us.

[1 : 25] Because in these verses, we're going to get right to the heart of what it means to be a Christian. So whoever you are here this morning, the God we've been singing about and praising this morning, whether he's distant to you, I'd encourage you to listen in.

Whether you are flying in your Christian life, I'd encourage you to listen in. And whether you're struggling in your Christian life, I'd encourage you to listen in. Because this is going to take us right to the heart of what it means to be a Christian.

And to get us into this passage this morning, let me just put a figure up on the screen. So the figure is, you can see it there, it's 2 billion. Now that figure represents the number of people.

It's a lot of people, right? 2 billion people. Don't know if you know this, but that is the number of people who, back in 2011, around the world, watched Kate Middleton marry Prince William. 2 billion people. Put your hands up if you were one of those 2 billion people. So, I heard on the grapevine there was a lot of heartbroken young women that day, thinking that should have been me.

[2 : 40] But I remember where I was on that day. I was one of those 2 million people. And I remember it well, because I was living in Bristol at the time. And my boss had given me the day off work to watch it.

And there I was in the baking heat, which England does have, which we don't have up here, by the way. Baking heat. And there I was, I was watching it in my flip-flops and shorts. So I remember where I was when I was watching this royal wedding.

And all eyes were on Kate, if you remember that day. All eyes were on Kate. Kind of, Sorry? Kind of what happens, isn't it, when a wedding happens? All eyes are on the bride.

What will she be wearing? What will her hair be like? What pattern will her dress be? What time will she arrive? All eyes are normally on the bride.

And even more so was the case on this day. Because we were all watching this, knowing that for Kate, this was the moment in her life where everything was about to change.

[3 : 42] Maybe somebody wants to get the door to the back. Everything for Kate was about to change. Because this was the day when this little girl from Reading, who studied history of art at St Andrews University, was not only officially declared to be married, but she was declared to be, in front of all of us in the watching world, she was declared to be a royal.

With new responsibilities and new privileges in her life. New priorities in her life and a new calling for her life because she was given a new identity.

So she walked down that aisle, Kate Middleton, and she walked back up at the Duchess of Cambridge. Total new identity for Kate.

And the reason I tell you that is because as we come to these verses this morning, there's a Kate Middleton moment, if I can put it like that, I'll coin that phrase. There's a Kate Middleton moment that's right at the heart of these verses.

That for the Christian, it's wonderfully true that because Jesus Christ has taken hold of your life, everything about you has changed. So if you've got your Bibles there, come with me to Colossus chapter 3 and let's just read these four short verses together.

[4 : 59] Now they're on the screen if you don't have your Bibles there, but I'd encourage you to grab your Bible because we'll be really in the text this morning. Colossus chapter 3. Remember Paul writing to this little church in Colossae, he writes and says this, Since then, you have been raised with Christ.

Set your hearts on the 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 will also appear with him in glory. So this is what Paul is writing.

Remember, he's writing to this gathering of Christians who are living out their faith in the first century in this city of Colossae. And if you remember back to where we left off at the end of November, where we've been so far in this letter is that Paul is painting a big picture of Jesus. A big picture of Jesus. A Jesus who is so much bigger than we think he is. A Jesus who is so much better than we think he is.

[6 : 27] And a Jesus through his death on the cross has paid for their sin and has reconciled them to the God who made them. A Jesus who lives in them by his Holy Spirit.

And he wants them to understand that anybody who would seek to distract their gaze from this Jesus, whether it be mysticism or Jewish religion or superstition, anyone who seeks to distract from Jesus is not worth listening to.

And so here we are then at the Kate Middleton moment of this letter where Paul declares for the Christian everything has changed. Everything's changed. It's interesting because it's probably not the first time in this letter that he's said this.

If you want to turn back to chapter 1 verse 22, the verses that our Paul took us through, Jesus has presented you, you see it there, this is the description of the Christian, holy, faultless and blameless before him, before God the Father.

Holy, faultless and blameless. This is our identity in Christ. It's not the first time he said this in the letter and I was thinking of it this week. How true is that that we need to be reminded of that?

[7 : 40] Because I don't know about you but I drift. We'll see this in a minute. I drift in my understanding of who I am in Christ. Paul has said this time and time and time again in the letter. There is your identity.

Now, chapter 3, first four verses. Notice that Paul uses the word you or you're six times there. Do you see it? You, you're, you, you're, you, you.

You can almost feel his hand reaching out from the page, one of those big novelty, big foam fingers you see in American football games and saying this is for you. Right? This is for you. You, he says. You, in your very ordinary, messy, working it out, slogging it out, unspectacular, unglamorous, works in progress Christian lives.

These glorious truths are for you. And you think, me, and my life, my unspectacular life, my struggling with sin, fighting, my flesh kind of life, yes, these truths are for you.

[8 : 41] And I also see that Paul uses the word Christ four times there. See it? With Christ, where Christ, with Christ, when Christ, you in Christ, you in Christ, that's the connection he's making.

And so these pivot voices, the pivot verses, if you like, in this letter where Paul moves from the theological, theological, that is who Jesus is and what he's done for you, and he moves to the practical as if to say, here's what it means for your life, here's what this identity will look like for your life.

He wants them to understand, get it in their minds that this is who they are. And who they are is that they are Christ's. They are in Christ.

That is their identity. They are Christ's. So the buzzwords of our day isn't it? Identity. People are always out to find who they really are.

Who are they in life? People going on gap year after gap year, moving from job to job, desperately trying to find out the real them.

[9 : 56] Or people aren't out to find out who they really are, maybe they're out to create who they are. So they spend hours and hours on social media, updating the Twitter profile, updating the Facebook profile, trying to create this online perception of themselves.

These are the pictures of me that I want people to see. These are the places that I want everybody to know that I've been to. These are the friends that I want everybody to know that I keep.

And these are the things that I want everybody to know that I do in my free time. Kind of summed up in the words of Woody Allen, if you remember Woody Allen of your certain generation. He said this, tongue in cheek.

He said, my one regret in life is that I am not someone else. Woody Allen. My one regret in life is I am not someone else. We're searching for identity.

And the thing is, by our very nature, we're tempted to derive our identity from other things.

Someone else want to get that door? Now you've heard of identity theft.

[11 : 05] Well, this is what I like to call identity drift. I want to, if you resonate with anything I'm about to say, we understand ourselves, don't we, primarily sometimes in relation to other things. By what job we have.

By how well our kids have turned out. Or are turning out. Or are not turning out. Or what place we're from. Or what results we've achieved. Or what funds we've got in the bank account.

And if you think to yourself, I wonder, I don't know if that's true for me. Well then ask yourself, that I asked myself this week, how do you react when those things fail you? I know how I react so often.

Or even if we kind of get that we're not defined by those things, how often are we tempted to define ourselves in our Christian lives by how we're doing. When I'm performing well as a Christian.

When I've woken up at 6.30 and I've had my quiet time. When I've woken up early and I've prayed.

When I've tithed my 10%. When I've gone to that service. I'm tempted to think that I'm somebody.

[12 : 11] I don't know how this works out for you, but I know in those moments my thoughts so easily turn to, doesn't it totally make sense that God picked me for his team.

I often find it it's in those times when I'll walk into a lamppost, did that this week, or I'll realise that I'm walking around with the tag still on my jumper. God's way of reminding me, I think, humbling me as if to say, yeah, Graham, we both know that's not true.

But the flip side can also be true, can't it? Speaking from my own experience and that of walking alongside some of you in life, if there's a temptation to find my identity in how I'm performing, is it not just equally an identity to fall off the horse on the other side and find my identity in how I'm not performing?

Curse those dated Bible reading devotions. It's the 20th of January and I'm still on the 4th, right? I miss the prayer meeting again. Why am I still struggling in my Christian life with that sin that I cannot seem to shrug?

Why am I not feeling it all the time in the Christian life? And you slip, as John Bunyan used to write in his Pilgrim's Progress, you slip into the swamp of despair.

[13 : 31] And your conclusion in life is that surely this can't be true for me because if it was true for me then I'd simply I'd be performing in doing better. And the thing is whatever side of the horse you fall off, friends, they are terrible foundations for us to build our lives upon.

Do you know why? Because they're based on us. They're based on us. And I don't know about you but I change. I'm here one minute and I'm there the next minute.

What we need is an identity that is not based on us. And our performance and our feelings which are so unreliable. And the good news of these verses is that into our identity confused world God speaks good news of the true identity of the Christian.

And the amazing thing is that this is an identity that you and I can rest in. It's a lovely gospel word that isn't it? It's a very good rest. Love it when Jesus says that in the gospels come all ye to me who are heavy burdened and I will give you rest.

It's like to say find in me your all in all. And this frees us doesn't it? Allows us to take the mask off and to stop worrying about how we're coming across.

[14 : 55] Because that's true isn't it? That the amazing truth of the gospel is that Jesus outed me and you as failures on the cross as sinners on the cross because if we weren't sinners he wouldn't have needed to die for us.

He identifies with us and he says I've taken your sin and I'm bestowing on you my life and that frees me friends to admit that I am not sorted and to stop pretending that I'm sorted and to live out my life by the grace of God saying I am not what I want to be but by the grace of God I am what I am. Here's an identity that Jesus has won for us. There's a famous story told of Martin Lloyd-Jones who was a famous Welsh minister from about 100 years ago and he was speaking one evening to a member of his congregation and the member of his congregation is telling Martin Lloyd-Jones how he was feeling weighed down with his sin how he just couldn't understand why he was a Christian and it went on and on and on and on and Martin Lloyd-Jones good pastor that he was he listened for a good chunk of time and he just turned to the man and he said have you not realised that so much of your unhappiness in life comes from the fact that you are listening to yourself rather than talking to yourself in other words let God speak truth about who you are to your heart and that's what I invite you to do this morning this afternoon as we journey through these verses is to allow God to speak to your heart about the truth of who you are in him don't find your identity in anything else anything other than him let God speak deep into your life and I've got two very quick takeaway points from us from this passage about what it means to be

Jesus you ready for these if you've zoned out zoned back in this is what it means to be Jesus it's two things firstly Jesus changes who we are he changes who we are look with it look with me at chapter 3 those opening verses you see Jesus has changed this identity that runs in three directions you think like me this is your 3D okay three directions he's changed the past look with me verse 3 those two words you died you died writes Paul that's the truth if you're a Christian you have died you've died in that before you were a Christian there was a you who was trying to force your way and live your life without God remember there was a song that my dad used to play in the car when we were young and it was written by a band called Fleetwood Mac remember Fleetwood Mac and the song just went you can go your own way you can go your own way great song but that is the identity of all of us before God got involved in our lives we were not running towards sin we were running away from him and that old life friends that was a guilty life deserving of God's we'll see this more next week deserving of God's wrath his righteous anger against our sin against our maker but when you became a Christian that old you died in that it was nailed to the cross with Jesus and through his death on the cross for us him shedding his blood for us paying the penalty for our sin we have received forgiveness and that old us has gone and that new us has come that old us has died it's over it's finished and we can leave it behind because Jesus has paid for it this is our enemy loving pursuing God that we're speaking about here praise him that doesn't mean that there are no earthly consequences that might remain from our old life but what this does mean is that as far as God is concerned because of Jesus because of our faith in him because of our trust in him that old life is gone because that old life has been dealt with and we can sing and I still remember the day having sang this old hymn for years that it didn't make sense to me and all of a sudden it made sense to me my sin oh the bliss of this glorious thought my sin not in part but the whole is nailed to the cross and I bear it no more praise the

[19 : 21] Lord praise the Lord oh my soul that is the truth of the gospel and if you're struggling with this this morning thinking is that true for me then this passage tells you yes that's true for you the old has gone Jesus dealt with it he changes the past and he changes the present in other words if the old you has gone the new you has come God isn't into weeding just he's also into seeding weeding and seeding the old you has gone the new you has come verse one we've been raised with Christ we're united with him in his death and we're united with him in his resurrection and your life verse three is so bound up with Jesus so much so that Paul can describe it as being and this is one of the most wonderful descriptions of the Christian hidden in Christ in God hidden in Christ in God you feel the security of that hidden in Christ in God we went up for a walk up Blackford Hill with some friends on New Year's Day and we got the girls out of the car and it was freezing cold on New Year's Day if you remember we got the girls out of the car got them all wrapped up and the temperature at the bottom of Blackford Hill

I'd forgotten I'd climbed it in years I'd forgotten how steep it is the temperature at the bottom was bearable but the more we climbed up this hill the colder it got until eventually our two little ones let us know that we weren't going to go on any further and so we sat kind of halfway up Blackford Hill overlooking the city a beautiful view and Alex and I just sat there with one child each and we just engulfed them so we did we just took them and we just engulfed them and I think that's a beautiful description of what Paul's describing here isn't it this is what Jesus has done they're so bound up are our lives in him that Paul can say that our lives are hidden in him which means that when God looks at us he sees Jesus he doesn't see our sin he sees as we were singing in that first song he sees his righteousness his perfect life he doesn't see the old us he sees the news that knew us that Jesus has taken and hidden in him and we are welcomed into the family of God invited to live our lives in relationship with the God who made us that is God's assessment of us in Christ isn't that wonderful it speaks of complete and relational security that God has done all this in Christ and the spirit awakens our hearts and our minds to the truth that we are his we are his no matter how we're feeling this morning no matter how we're performing this morning if our trust is in him we are his he changes the past he changes the present and you can guess where we're going next can't you he changes the future he changes the future verse 4 when Christ appears

Paul's talking about his second coming when Christ as we were singing will come in all his glory he will come as king and judge and what will he do he will reclaim creation for himself and that will be a day when we don't cower before him that will be a day when we will appear with him and we will reign with him you know I wonder whether these Christians in this church in Colossae with these if you remember the background there's false teachers in the background they're teaching that religion and mysticism and superstition are the key to spiritual growth are the key things that are going to gain you access to God and Paul is saying all you need is Christ there's only one that can lead us into the presence of God and it's Christ you've access to your father through him he's all you need but I wonder if they're sitting there thinking to themselves are we the real deal everything that in your Christian life as you look at your unspectacular Christian life just slogging it out sanctification is a long process

God is not in a hurry with us think am I missing out am I being held back in the Christian life well what Paul is saying here is that you don't need ten steps to a better spirituality to grow as a Christian you just need to embrace your identity in Christ and you need to live in light of it Jesus has changed your past he's changed your present and he will change your future he has changed that future it's guaranteed what a transformation that is do you see it past present future what a transformation that's our identity if you're trusting in him this morning the old you has gone and the new you the one that's in Christ has come and that means that you and I have been chosen we've been forgiven we've been spirit filled we've been declared right with God we have peace with him we've been invited near into the very family of God once a stranger now declared and spoken to as a son and daughter and we've been held by Christ and he guarantees us a glorious future this is who we are how freeing how liberating are those words how freeing and liberating does it make us feel in life how liberating and freeing does it make us feel in our evangelism that there's the ends of Romans 8 if you want to check that out when you go home

Paul says there's nothing that can separate us in other words Christ's grip on our life is so strong nothing can separate us for as different why are we scared of telling others about Jesus why is the fear of man so great in our hearts answer because the fear of God the picture of him is small Paul's saying get it the other way around this is who you are you're his not because of anything you've done but all because of Jesus that way he gets all the glory Jesus changes who you are and secondly and this will be very very quick because we'll be expanding on this in the weeks to come flowing from our new identity in him Paul says Jesus changes how you live now if I can verse creep again I'm going to coin that phrase down to verse 10 I just want you to see this so I can kind of frame this rest of this section as we journey through it look what Paul writes about the new you the new you it's being renewed that's the word he uses there that wonderful caterpillar to butterfly kind of word renewed in knowledge after what the image of its creator now this is what happens to me [26 : 29] I find this every Sunday morning when I come in here I look down here and I normally see Gary or Jamie tuning their guitars every Sunday guarantee it this is what I see they're tuning their guitars now I'm no guitar expert I can kind of have a crack at Wonderwall by Oasis and the guitar but that's about all I can do but even I know when I watch them do that the reason that they do that is that because somehow or other that guitar has become untuned and they sit there and what they do is they just tune it again get it right again and there's something of that truth isn't there in those

verses that word you see the wonderful truth that the Bible tells us about us is that we were made in the image of God it's why we believe that every human being has an inherent worth to them because we're made in the image of God made to live our lives with him made to live our lives looking to him but the sobering truth that the Bible tells us about us is that sin our sin has so affected us right to the core that it's distorted that image so much so that we by nature turn away from God rather than turn towards him so Martin Luther used to call used to call sin the thing that's turned us inwards on ourselves that's the idea here but the thing is when Jesus

Christ took hold of our lives and as his spirit works in us he moulds us and he tunes us day after day after day after day after day back into the way that we were designed to be as if God is declaring over us that I made you in my image I made you for myself and I have saved you through the sending of my son and I have turned you through the work of my spirit and I have brought you back to me so that you can fully bear that image to the world once again as you live your life in community with your fellow brothers and sisters and however imperfectly it may look this side of eternity that's what I'm doing in your hearts and lives and the perfect picture of who I'm transforming you into is the Lord Jesus Christ you see as we turn to the moral imperatives in this letter we need to understand that that's what's going on here otherwise this would be just be dry moralism don't do this do that that's what's not what's going on here this is

God ordained Christ one spirit filled inside out transformation so we've seen all the way through this letter isn't it this is not an outward in kind of change that just doesn't work so Jesus says isn't it that the problem's not outside it's inside it's not going to work what we need is a inside out kind of change and so Paul says in light of who you are Colossians verse one see the command seek the things that are above seek the things that are above set your minds on the things above now feel the force of the verbs there seek and set on the things above and in the negative nod on the things of earth and the logic surely is that because you are Christ's then actively pursue the things of his kingdom invest yourselves not in things that are temporary but invest yourselves in things that are eternal people now imagine when they read this out to this little gathering of believers in the church the false teachers are in the background the guys who are promoting angel worship mysticism superstition and they read that they hear that and they say seek the things that are above amen brother

Paul let's get the drums back on the go and let's get the angel worship banging again because that's what they think when they read this but you see how Paul he grounds this in the nitty gritty details of their lives in other words this is what true spirituality is going to look like this is what true inward outward change will look like what will it look like we'll see this in the weeks to come it will mean saying no to the ways of the old self and it will look like saying yes to the things of the new self Jesus changes who you are says Paul if you're a Christian that is gloriously true and Jesus changes how you live you know just as we close I was thinking on it this week I wonder what went through the Duchess of Cambridge's mind in the days and the weeks following her wedding day I wonder whether there were times that she wandered the palace or she was out and about and people are she's meeting school children or she's meeting

NHS employees whoever she's meeting the pictures show us people are bowing to her people are curtsying to her and she thinks to herself maybe thinking back on the things that she did when she grew up or the things that she said or did when she was at uni and she thought to herself who am I that this would happen to me but the truth is if you think about it she is who she is not because of anything that she's done she is who she is simply because of the identity of her husband that's all she's got that's all she's got all she did was say yes and the same is absolutely true for the Christian there are identities not in us not found in us it's found through looking at Jesus our saving spouse I wonder even if even during our short time together this afternoon the evil one has been speaking words of accusation and guilt into your ear maybe bringing up stuff that you did last year last week even last night and saying how dare you think that this is true for you how dare you think that this is true for you

[32 : 27] Paul would say to us and the risen Lord Jesus who's speaking through these words would say to us this morning that you are who you are not because of what you've done but you are who you are because I've claimed you as my own and you're mine and all you've done is say yes for you died says Paul the old you has gone the new you has come in your life is now hidden with Christ in God and we're going to pray in just a second but why don't we just take a moment of silence and maybe just cast your eye over these verses again and allow God by his spirit just to

sink these deep truths into your heart and then I'll pray and we'll close and so gracious God and loving heavenly father thank you so much for these words this morning these words of truth and I pray lord knowing my own heart and all of us knowing our own hearts father so often how we're tempted to forge our own way in the world and we think of

David's words at the start that we prayed that you would lead us to the rock who is higher than us and so we pray dear father that you would remind us of these truths that you would embed them deep into our hearts and our lives and father that by your spirit living in us you would help us to grasp them more and live in light of that new identity behold him there the risen lamb my perfect spotless righteousness the great unchangeable I am the king of glory and of grace one with himself I cannot die my soul is purchased by his blood my life is hid with Christ on high with Christ my saviour and my

God with Christ my saviour and my God heavenly father thank you for the incredible love which you have shown us and we praise you and we pray knowing that you hear us because we pray in Jesus' name Amen