

Complete: Location Matters – Colossians 2:20-3:4

I have a friend who I grew up with who has always asked me this question, “Do you think you would be a Christian and believe the same things if you were born in a Muslim Country?” It’s an interesting question and I have to answer honestly that I certainly can’t know for sure that I would and the chances are very high that I would not.

Now, nothing about that answer makes Christianity any less true and the Bible less reliable. But it does emphasize the significance of place, culture, and location in each of our lives. All of us do what we do and have the qualities we have because of where we grew up and the location we consider home. It’s a major factor in our lives.

I’ve often heard that I don’t have a big southern accent even though I grew up in central Virginia, but also that there are moments when my roots show and you can pick up that I’m not from the Midwest originally. I do not have the born and bred Midwest trait of absolute frugality. I like to save money, but it’s not one of the highest goods a human can achieve where I’m from.

Throughout Colossians Paul has used language that points us to our location “in Christ”. It’s vital for your identity and how you move through the world that you understand where your true life is located and how that defines you. Throughout Colossians Paul has also warned the Colossians about the false teachers who are threatening their relationship with Christ. He’s going to wrap up his direct confrontation with that teaching at the end of chapter 2 and then begin to describe how the Colossians should live because of Christ in chapter 3.

But, the main message he used to bridge the gap between the false teaching and the positive life you now live is location. The difference is a matter of where you actually live, where your real life exists, and what location determines your values, desires, and way of life. Here’s what Paul will essentially say to the Colossians: You can either live like you are a citizen of earth and let the ways of earth define you, or you can live like you are a citizen of heaven, and let the values of heaven define you.

I want to show you this contrast in the passage. First, look at 2:20 and 3:1. Notice the way both sections start with the word “IF”. Verse 20 asks a question, if you died with Christ to the elemental spirits of the world and then notice Paul’s question. “Why, as if you were alive in the world”. In other words, the false teachers want the Colossians to think and act in a very human and very earthly way. They want them to think of their lives as consisting on earth and only on earth.

But notice 3:1. You died with Christ and are no longer a citizen of earth but now you have been raised with Christ. Raised to what? Look at 3:3. Your life, your location, your existence is now determined by heaven, where Christ is, not earth.

There are two distinct locations that can determine the course of your life. Where are you located this morning? What’s your home country? What’s your accent? What qualities are you exhibiting? So, with this contrast in mind, here is what Paul teaches through this text. **2 Habits to Help Us Live as Heavenly Citizens.**

1. Stop Acting Like You Live Here (2:20-23)

Paul wants you to stop when you get to verse 20 and ponder whether or not you have actually died with Christ to the world around you. How can you tell if this life is shaping you instead of heaven? Look at verse 20. Paul has warned about the elemental spirits of the world in 2:8 and his entire warning in verse 8 was to avoid merely human religion. There’s something very typical of the way every world religion approaches God in these false teachers. They believe extra rules and regulations are the pathway to avoid sin and they trust in spiritual powers and experiences.

Paul’s point in verse 20 is that if you are joined to Christ, your faith doesn’t operate the same way every other religion does. You do not need to pile extra rules on top of Christ to make progress. Look at verse 21. We don’t know exactly what these “rules” were in reference to, but clearly they were restrictive. The false teachers wanted the Colossians to avoid certain gifts given by God and they gave people guidelines to live by that supposedly helped them. It’s probably something similar to what Paul warned Timothy about in 1 Timothy 4:1-5.

The real problem here is that these are very earthly, human ways of thinking about holiness and religion. Look at verse 22. And because of this, they don't do anything to actually help you put sin to death and bring spiritual transformation. Look at verse 23.

Paul's issue is that this is what every other faith does because this is the type of logic and reasoning that sinful human beings come up with to try and solve the sin problem and earn God's favor. When we act this way, we are identifying our location as here. We are thinking and living and trying to make spiritual progress like every other faith option out there. We betray that our citizenship may not actually be heaven.

When I travel to Nepal one of the first things they tell you is not to drink the water from the tap. But it's more than just that. You cannot even brush your teeth with it or get any in your mouth when you shower. The bacteria in it will most likely make a westerner sick. So, I get into the practice while I'm there of brushing my teeth with a bottle of water. I pour the water on, brush, rinse with bottled water and clean my toothbrush off with bottled water.

This is a way of life that is particular to life in Nepal for me. It would be weird if I came back and did the same thing in my own house here. If I kept the practices of life in Nepal here in this culture. Paul is telling us not to live our lives as if we are citizens of this earth.

We Christians in the US have a pretty rich history of doing this exact thing. We add rules and regulations onto what is clearly revealed in God's Word, and we tell people this is the pathway to holiness. The Christian life then becomes about what you avoid, and we miss the center of the whole thing. And what is that center? Listen back to Colossians 1:3-6. It's about the grace of God in truth expressed in the gospel.

"Why do some of us experience Christianity as a burden and others as a refuge? The answer, I am convinced, has to do with grace. Grace is the Big Relief at the heart of Christianity. When grace is downplayed or qualified, faith turns into a project and then a burden. Project religion - the ancient human enterprise of

proving ourselves morally and spiritually worthy of God's love - is everywhere. You can recognize it by the refugees it drives out." - David Zahl

This is what Paul was warning against and it's what happens when we identify ourselves with temporal life here on earth. But where are we truly located?

2. Start Aligning Your Life with Heaven (3:1-4)

You died to the world, the system of unbelievers and false beliefs that leave God out and reflect sinful human life. You died with Christ to this, but you were also raised with Christ. 3:1. Since you have been raised with Christ Paul has two responses. They are found in verses 1 and 2 and start with the same letter. Seek the things above and set your minds on things above.

To seek is about your desires, loves, and affections, and to set your mind is about your thinking and your will. Turn all of you away from worldly thinking and living and to that which is above. Ok, but what exactly do I find "above" that I must seek and set my mind on? Look in verse 1 again.

Of course Christ is at the heart of our new focus and attention. But specifically we are directed toward Christ being at the Father's right hand. This is the place of power and authority and Christ is there because of His victory over sin and death in his death and resurrection. To seek that which is above and set our minds on that which is above is to align ourselves with Christ's position as King and authority. It's to live as if He's the firstborn of all creation and the firstborn from the dead. It's for my values to become the values of heaven, where Jesus is exalted right now. It's for my perspective to be shaped by heaven rather than earth.

Why must I seek and set on things above? Look at verses 3 and 4. Verse 3 gives you the current reality and verse 4 gives you what's coming in the future. You are joined to Christ and so right now your life is hidden with Him in God. In other words, your true life and true location and true citizenship is in heaven. But that's not the experience of your physical body this week. This truth is real but hidden. But your home is there. It's like being on a business trip in another country. Your

home still dominates your thoughts, values, and actions, but your home is hidden at the moment. But that hiddenness won't always be the case. Verse 4.

Your heavenly way of life seems strange to worldly people now, but there will come a day when it will be revealed as the most real thing in the universe. It will make sense. Your home country's values, loves, and way of life will be clear and obvious. Both the present hiddenness and the promise of future revelation confirm our location in heaven with Christ and shape our identity and citizenship now.

Listen to Philippians 3:17-21.

So, if this is where true life is for us, how do we seek and set on things above in the present? How do we bring the culture of heaven here and live it out? Here are a couple of thoughts:

First, when was the last time you actually thought of eternity? When was the last time you spent a few moments pondering what it will be like when your eyes close in death and you open them in Christ's presence? What will change? What will life be like on the new earth with God? What will it be like to have no more sinful impulses? Meditate on those coming events to set your mind on what's above.

Second, ask yourself what the values of heaven are? What does my home realm treasure? What matters there? Are those values my values?

Third, where do I pursue spiritual progress in an earthly way? What extras do I add on to try and make myself holy and sin less, but these are really just typical human religious activities that are of no value?

Finally, ponder the truth that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father, and you are seated with Him. Why does this matter? What does this change about my life this week?

I'll leave you with a word from C.S. Lewis:

"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. The Apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up

the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the Slave Trade, all left their mark on Earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with Heaven. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this. Aim at Heaven and you will get earth 'thrown in': aim at earth and you will get neither." - C.S. Lewis

Sermon Reflection Questions – 5/10/26

- Are there any specific ways you recognize that you are shaped by the place you grew up?
- Briefly explain your understanding of the doctrine of our Union with Christ and why it matters.
- How do you see this idea of location used in Colossians 2:20-3:4?
- What would be some modern examples of the rules Paul lists in Colossians 2:21?
- What are some ways you are tempted to prove yourself “morally and spiritually worthy of God’s love”? (David Zahl)
- When Paul uses the word “above” in 3:1, 2, what is he indicating?
- How is your life hidden with Christ in God right now? What does this mean?
- What are some characteristics of heaven that seem strange on earth?
- What are some values of heaven?
- What are some earthly ways that we pursue spiritual progress?

- Why do you think Paul mentions that Christ is seated at the right hand of God?
- What are some practical ways to think more of heaven and to set your mind on things above?