

I noted two weeks ago that Paul follows the two negative commands to not be condemned by anything not according to Christ with two positive commands here in chapter 3. The first was “Seek the things above” and addressed how our hearts are always seeking to find the things which will make us right with God, with others, and with ourselves. Those things are only found in the finished works of Jesus.

The second command which Paul gives us in the light of our union with Christ is to "Set your minds on the things above, not on the earthly things." **To set your mind is a word which means, not merely to think about something, but to *account it as valuable*.**

For example, it is the word used in Philippians 2:5, “Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus...” This doesn’t mean to merely think like Jesus, but to consider humble service to one another as valuable.

It is the same word that Jesus used when speaking to Peter in Matthew 16, scolding him by famously saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you are not 'setting your mind' on God's interests, but on man's." Peter was not valuing the things of God, but the things of man. He was not properly weighing their significance and value and importance.

Therefore, the command to "set our minds" on the things above is the command to appreciate them, to hold them in the highest honor, to deem them the most significant

and most important things. And why? Because they actually are! **They are the things that last, they have the *quality of eternity, of incorruptibility.***

This is what the word “eternal” actually means. It is not merely something that lasts a long time, but something which has the *quality of being incorruptible*. That is why it is valuable. Like gold, which is valuable because it doesn’t corrode in the presence of oxygen. The “things above” are those things of the quality of incorruptibility. Set your minds on the eternal things. Jesus famously speaks of His return as that which "makes all things new." This means that he will make all things incorruptible, unfading, of the quality which doesn’t pass away and cannot be shaken or burned up.

These unshakable things, the things that don't pass away, are those things which we ought to deem as worthy of pursuit and worthy of setting our highest priority upon are the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. They are the things which God reckons to be worthwhile.

It is so easy to become discouraged about this, because like Paul notes, these thing are hidden, and we must wait for their revealing. For now, we live in the darkness of night, as Jesus said, and we await the dawn of His return to make all things new. It feels like forever, and sometimes, frankly, it feels untrue, because they have never been fully seen. We see in part, we know in part, and often that leads to our doubt, does it not?

We are so quick to trust our own experiences, our own feelings, or more aptly, our interpretation of our experience. But why do we trust our limited understanding? I mean, this concept of "hidden with Christ in God" is about the whole story, all the chapters, not merely the first three or four. Too often we base our understanding of reality upon the early chapters, of what is right now, but a good mystery never reveals the whole story until the end...and we wouldn't have it any other way.

Have you ever considered how much we, as humans, love mystery? Granted, there are times we are desperate for answers, because the stakes are so invariably high. But, the mystery genre of literature is the bestselling genre in literature. In fact, a 2017 study in the UK showed that crime fiction, particularly, overtook all other general fiction as the most popular literary genre.

David Balducci notes that crime fiction does two things which speak to the core of our humanity: 1) It presents a puzzle to solve, a series of questions which compel us to discover the answers, and 2) It sets everything right - the bad guys go down and the good guys generally win. This duality of mystery and redemption is what every human heart sets about to reconcile with the world around it. There are questions, so many questions, and we are compelled to hunt down the answers. Crime and mystery literature sates this desire because it can be accomplished in that fictional world, when it cannot be accomplished in the real world. And there is evil, without us and within us, which we know must be set right, must be redeemed, must be made new, if there is to be a true and real resolution to such a mystery. So when Hercule Poirot finally points

out the bad guy, and shows us that he doesn't just get away with it, our souls are satisfied in the revelation. But, in the real world, things are still not set right. In the real world evil still wins too often and good fails. But, could it be that is because we have not reached the final chapter, the chapter where all things are made right?

This reality, the paradox of a deep desire to search for the answers and a deep desire to know the answers, push our enjoyment of great literature and cinema. However, the storytelling is not in merely giving the answers, but in *how* you give the answers, and the power of great storytelling is not merely in redeeming everything in the beginning of the movie, but of the characters' struggle in the seemingly doomed conflict, the shadows of Mordor and the rocky terrain around Mount Doom where Frodo and Sam are so exposed to the eye of the enemy, that makes the resolution so sweet, so glorious, so triumphant. And the greater the conflict and struggle, the greater that the resolution seems insurmountable, means that the greater degree that the glory of the redemption shines in its triumph.

What greater degree of hopelessness can arise than the presence of our weakened state, this battle of the flesh, this deadness in our souls, which we so desperately want to be rid of, but also secretly love? What conflict rages more than the conflict within the heart of man, who seeks to know the answers of life, but is simply too small and finite to find them? Not only too finite, but too arrogant, too unwilling to listen to the author's clues, and to what the author has revealed in this story?

We want to know the answers. We want to see them to believe them. But God tells us that our life, that for which we strive to obtain, is hidden with Christ in God, and we must wait for their unveiling, for the next chapter's revelation of them. But what God does differently is tell us the end of the story, the Hero has been revealed and His victory announced, so we have reason to hope. The ending is not in question. This union which we have with Jesus, this belonging and fulfillment and shalom (peace), the way things are supposed to be, is secure in the heavens, though we cannot see it, nor do we always experience its reality now. It is hidden just as Christ is hidden. We know the coming chapter, but we are living in the darkness of the middle chapters, in the chaos and darkness and dire moments of sin's presence and corruption's gain.

Our faith, then, is entrusting the Author to make us right and set all things right, even though we cannot see it now. He has shown us some things and told us the end of the story! He has revealed His story of redemption and resurrection in the midst of our travails. Such clues remind me of a passage from J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Return of the King*, when Sam and Frodo are hopeless in the barren darkness of Mordor.

“Sam struggled with his own weariness, and he took Frodo's hand; and there he sat silent till deep night fell. Then at last, to keep himself awake, he crawled from the hiding-place and looked out. The land seemed full of creaking and cracking and sly noises, but there was no sound of voice or of foot. Far above the *Ephel Dúath* in the West the night-sky was still dim and pale. There, peeping among the cloud-wrack above a dark tor high up in the mountains, Sam saw a white star twinkle for a while. The beauty of it smote his heart, as he looked up out of the forsaken land, and hope returned to him. For like a shaft, clear and cold, the thought pierced him that in the end the Shadow was only a small and passing thing: there was light and high beauty forever beyond its reach. His song in the Tower had been defiance rather than hope; for then he was thinking of himself. Now, for a moment, his own fate, and even his masters, ceased to trouble him. He crawled back into the brambles and laid himself by Frodo's side, and putting away all fear he cast himself into a deep untroubled sleep.”

That is God's doing, giving us glimpses, raising His Son from the dead. That is God's plan. That is God telling His story in the best way so as to make His setting of all things right the most surprising to the world, the most enthralling to the hearts of creation, and the most glorious in His triumph.

But can you imagine what that day will bring, when the Shadow passes forever? There is great good in doing so, I would say. Our imaginations are meant for such a time as this. When Christ Jesus ceases to be hidden from us, when He physically returns to our sight, , then we, too, will be seen as we truly are, for what we are truly meant to be...alive in all the fullness of life, for we are bound to Him, our life to His life, His death is our death. This hope can help us put away all fear and cast ourselves into a deep and untroubled sleep in the darkest of dungeons.

And don't miss that your life is "with Christ" now. Though we walk through this valley of deep darkness, we are not alone. Remember when Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead, that when He arrived, He knew that in 10 minutes he was going to undo the great sorrow which Mary and Martha, Lazarus' sisters, were experiencing. He knew that He had the power and He knew the joy of the next chapter for them. Yet, he wept. Why did he weep if He knew what was coming in mere minutes? Because not only are you united to His glory, but He is united to your grief. You are never alone in your sorrow and grief, in your frustrations in the corruptions of this world, the corruptions and weaknesses of your own heart. Your life is hidden *with Christ* who is your life. That's

how close your experiences are felt by Him...and though He knows the coming glory, He doesn't roll his eyes at your weakness in this moment, but He weeps with you in it. That is the fellowship of Jesus.

And in this darkness, in the fog of this corruption, appreciate the coming glory.

Though we grieve in this darkness, we grieve with hope! What powerful motivators of truth! Though Christ is hidden now, and your eternal life, your true life, is also hidden with Him because He is your life, it will one day be "uncovered."

Today, Christ may be hidden behind the frowning clouds of providence, but behind those frowning clouds God hides a smiling face ready to release an eternity of joy upon you who are united to His Son. You are covered, behind that veil, obscured as to what you one day will be because you are united to Christ Jesus by faith. This means that no matter what fears you experience now, no matter how far your efforts fall short of your intentions, no matter what your anxieties may say to you or your consciences may accuse you, your life is secure behind the veil, in the keeping of the Christ. It is not able to be threatened with any lasting threat. The Accuser may want you to think so, that your life is forfeit, your dreams lost, your holiness obliterated by your sin, but the Reality, capital R, REALITY, is that such a loss can never occur if you are united to Christ Jesus by faith. Because you have already died, your dreams already dashed, your holiness already obliterated by the fiery wrath of God's justice, your life forfeited at the cross of Christ. With Him you are already executed...and NOW you are raised up with Him in resurrection power, your life regained anew in glorious power, your dreams

achieved in the fullness of all that they were meant to be, and your holiness secured and obtained as one fit for the presence of the holy God in all the blamelessness and perfection of the pre-Eden serpent's slithering tongue when Adam walked with God in the cool of the day. Though you cannot see it, yet, this is true because you are united to Christ Jesus. Appreciate this truth more than what you can see and more than what you feel. You are to see this truth as more significant than your performance, than your suffering, than your struggles, because there are chapters yet to come which will make all which you are enduring now make sense in the light of the glorious revelation of the real you with the Real Jesus to whom you are bound.

In glory. That's the last phrase. That is the manner in which your life will be revealed. All the squeezings and all the sorrows and all the sufferings which you experience are producing for you an eternal weight of glory which is so great, so explosively beautiful that it makes our suffering unworthy to be compared to it.

Everything will be as it is supposed to be, the fullness of life invigorated by the eternal life of Christ Himself. What *kind* of life does Christ Jesus have? Incorruptible! undefiled! Pure and holy and good! Right and beautiful and honorable! So good that He emanates truth – living and life-giving water flows from within Him...and it will from you who are united to Him.

Do you realize that God delights in you as He does His Son? Did you know that? Because you are united to Christ. Therefore, by the sovereign plan of God, according to His kind intentions towards you, accomplished by the willing love of His Son, God now

treats you as He treats His Son when it comes to honor. So, what shame can outshine His honor? What failure of yours could possibly usurp the glory of Christ? What stain by which you have stained yourself can outshine the glorious white clothing from His wardrobe?!

So, how are we, then, to value the things above? The eternal things, when our experiences rage around us and within us, pulling our eyes off the things above and insufferably drawing them down to our experiences on this earth? How can we walk in the light of the fact that we no longer value the things passing away, and live in the light of the eternal things which God has declared?

We must fix our attention and our imagination upon the Christ whom God has revealed to us. We must ponder Him, His incorruptibility, His perfections and power and promises, and seek Him and listen to His Word. We must heed the promises of God in His Word, the Scriptures, for our certainty. Promises like verse 4, "when Christ, *who is your life*, is revealed, we will be revealed with Him in glory." What does this mean: he is our life?

In a sense, Paul tells us to look back at the previous chapter of the story with some new information. You have died, and your life is hidden. Those are past things. It's as if he is saying, "Look back and see the cross! See when Jesus died. **YOU WERE THERE** the whole time! When Jesus was raised up in power, having been unable to be kept down even by death? **YOU WERE THERE THE WHOLE TIME, too!**" In order to walk in

present hope, we must first look to the past with this new information. Then, however, he tells us to look forward with new information. When Christ is uncovered, when his hiddenness disappears and He returns again physically, **YOU WILL BE THERE, TOO!** When He comes in glory, so you will be revealed in glory.

John reveals this coming chapter of glory like this: "When we see Him as He is we will be like Him!" Peter says that such a hope is certain, as he wrote, "God has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be uncovered in the last chapter. In this you rejoice, although you now, if necessary, are suffering for a short time with many troubles, so that the sincerity of your faith may be proven though tested by fire, and found to result in praise, and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ."

Such a faith leads us to "rejoice with an indescribable joy which is full of glory!" So, what is glory? Glory is the word which is best described as "honorable quality". It is the characteristic of imminent goodness which is praiseworthy and laudable. It is worthy of song and celebration.

So, in the midst of your sufferings, remember the God who has ordained them is also the Jesus who endured them. Run to Him in the darkness, for the hands that lead you through it bear the scars of your afflictions.

When I suffer, I remember to whom I am wed: I do not worship a mere man who escaped suffering by any means, but I am bound to the God who ran headlong into shame that I might be granted honor. I am bound to Jesus the Triumphant, able to keep me by the power of His risen life.

I am bound to Jesus the resurrected one! The First and the Last, the Origin and the Ultimate! I am bound to the keeper of my faith, the holder of my inheritance, and the guardian of my soul.

Suffering could not sink Him! My shame he refused to shun! Pain could not pin him down! Sin can't stand before Him and the Accuser's accusation is annihilated in the presence of His power! Corruption will be burned up and I will rise in incorruptibility, the way that I am supposed to be!

I am bound to the one who loves me with a love formed before the foundational fires of the universe who holds in his mighty right hand the keys to Death and Corruption. I am bound to Jesus Christ, my life!

And when the perseverant patience of God has reached its goal, and the sky rolls up like a scroll to reveal the Son who judges the living and the dead, I will see Him face to face, risen and rising like the morning sun, and all the sin that still is present in me and all the sins committed against me will be burned away with holy fire and all that will be left is the purest gold of all that I was meant to be and the one for whom I am meant! He is risen and He reigns and I will see His face, and my sufferings will have produced a far more glorious height with Him than if I had never lost at all!

This is the Real which I will appreciate, the substance behind the shadows of this present darkness. The Sun is rising. The morning is coming. This is just the dark before the dawn, and tomorrow's brightness is going to outshine these dim earthly things. Appreciate these things, for they are Real.