

Colossians 3:1-4

Ascension Sunday, May 21, 2023
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If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Do you know what “Perfect Pitch” is? It’s an ability that certain people have to be able to produce any musical note off the top of their head, and they can do it with perfect accuracy. So, if you tell a person with perfect pitch to sing an A-flat, they will sing a perfect A-flat. If you tell them to sing a middle C, they will sing a middle C. I’m going to try to sing a F, and then I’ll play that on my pitch pipe here, to see how I did. . . Not exactly right. I don’t have perfect pitch. I had a trumpet instructor once, when I was younger, who could tune my trumpet perfectly, just by listening with his ear. He used his perfect pitch to perfectly tune his guitar, accurate every single time, which is a great skill to have if you’re a musician.

The people who have the gift of perfect pitch are few and far between. The rest of us—if we play an instrument or sing—we rely on special devices that give us the proper note. Like this pitch pipe that I’ve just used. These are designed to give the right starting note to a choir that’s singing a song without any accompaniment. If you play guitar, you might tune your guitar with a little guitar tuner that lets you know if you need to tighten or loosen your guitar strings. If you’re tuning a trumpet, you play a note on the piano to find the correct tuning of your trumpet.

And all of these methods work perfectly well, as long as those devices themselves are accurate. Well, this morning, the Apostle Paul is giving us a *very* accurate tuning device. It’s also a very important tool for living our Christian life. What is that device? The benchmark, the starting note for Christian living? It’s the Ascension of Jesus Christ. Today, Paul tells us to seek those things which are above, where Jesus is.

So, if you feel like you’ve maybe been seeking the wrong things in life lately, if you’ve been tuning in to the things of this world and tuning out the things of God, then today’s text is just what you need to get singing on key again. The theme that we’ll be considering this morning is:

The Ascension Gives Us Our Perfect Pitch

I. It’s perfect for revealing the false notes of this sinful world

II. It’s perfect for tuning our hearts to the glorious life to come

Now, if you were to list off the important holidays of the Church Year, your list would probably go something like this: Christmas, Maundy Thursday, Good Friday, Easter, Pentecost. And if you were really thinking hard, you might also include Ascension there between Easter and Pentecost. We don’t always think of Ascension Day as being all that important. Yes, it was the day Christ ascended into heaven, but, really, by that point all of the important stuff had already been accomplished, hadn’t it? So we might treat the Ascension as more of a footnote at the end of Jesus’ time on earth.

The official Ascension Day was actually three days ago, on Thursday, but I wonder if you thought about it? For me, I realized it in the morning, and I’m not sure I thought about it again, I’m sad to say. Because, regardless of where we might rank it in important church holidays, the truth is that the

celebration of our Lord's Ascension is one of the holiest days of the church year. Forty days after Easter, Jesus went up into heaven. Why is that important? How does that matter to you and me? Well, there are a number of great things about it.

For one thing, it's a tremendous comfort to us. Christ's Ascension into Heaven means that Jesus has all authority, that He truly is our King who is currently using His all-encompassing authority for our benefit. He's providing for our needs, protecting us from danger, fighting against our enemies—all the things a good king might do, Jesus is currently doing for you. Christ's Ascension also reminds us that our King was victorious. He's a King who has never been defeated and never will be. Speaking of Jesus' Ascension, the Apostle Paul writes to the Ephesians: ***"God raised Christ from the dead and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come."*** (Ephesians 1:20-21)

But there's another way that the Ascension is important, and that will be our main focus today. Paul says in the first verse of our text: ***"If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God."*** On that Ascension Day, where do you think the disciples were looking as Jesus rose to heaven? They were obviously looking to heaven, and Paul says that the fact that our Lord has ascended and is seated at a position of authority at the right hand of God, *our* eyes ought to be directed heavenward as well—focused on heavenly things. So, staring up at the heavens with the disciples to where Christ is, we now have a reference point for finding our perfect pitch. And the Ascension gives us perfect pitch *first* by revealing all the false notes of this sinful world.

You know, that's not an easy task for us, avoiding all the false notes of this world. Paul admonishes us in his letter to Titus, ***"For the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation for all people, training us to renounce ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright, and godly lives in the present age, waiting for our blessed hope, the appearing of the glory of our Great God and Savior Jesus Christ."*** (Titus 2:11-13) He tells us that as we wait for Christ's reappearing, we ought to avoid worldly passions and desires, reject ungodliness, and live lives of self-control and reverence for God. If *ONLY* we did that! The sad thing is that the things of this world tend to be very distracting.

I don't know how many of you have sung in a choir before, but if you have, you might have experience with this. All it takes is one singer singing flat to drag the entire choir down. It's very difficult for a choir to sing perfectly on pitch, especially if there is no piano accompaniment, because all it takes is a few flat notes and soon the whole choir will be singing off-key. Sadly, that's sort of how we operate in life too; we tend to copy the poor examples of those around us. We like to think that we can associate with whomever we want, watch whatever we want, and listen to whatever we want while maintaining our Christian lives, after all, "I just don't repeat those things." But is that ever really the case? Our minds are easily led astray. Coarse words and sinful mindsets and bad habits tend to slip into our lives as we gravitate to the environment in which we live.

Scripture says that God's Word is like a mirror, showing us what we look like due to our sin. James writes in his letter that as sinners, we tend to look into that mirror and see what we look like, but then we can go away and immediately forget what we saw! Yes, it's easy for us to lose our perfect

pitch, to start singing off tune with our lives. You get your starting note from God's Word, but then through the course of a week or a month or longer *apart* from God's Word, we start to get distracted by worldly things, and we get entirely out of tune.

But Ascension Day snaps us back. Paul says, "***Seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.***" Imagine you were standing there, in front of Christ's throne in heaven, and you were given thirty minutes to sit down and visit with Him. Let's say you sat down, and Jesus asked you what you had planned for this coming week. How uncomfortable would you feel as you went over your schedule with Him, as you realize how much more time you spend focused on things of this earth rather than heavenly things. Do you think any of your plans might change? Think you might rearrange your priorities?

For instance, I doubt you'd miss any prayers that week, right? I'm certain you'd make daily Bible readings a priority that week! And I doubt you'd plan on sleeping in and skipping church on Sunday! Well, do we need to go over our schedule with Jesus to make those changes? Why not make those changes anyway! If you're like me, you feel pretty guilty about all the attention you've been paying to rather useless and temporary things, and how little time you've spent focusing on God lately. And if we feel guilty, it's for good reason. We *are* guilty.

How can we get rid of that guilt? How can we get right with God? How can we lift our eyes heavenward once more and focus on heavenly things—on God and His Word, where our attention ought to lie? Right there is another reason why our Lord's Ascension is so important and how it gives us perfect pitch. Because Christ's Ascension is perfect for tuning our hearts to the glorious life to come.

Paul says in our text, "***For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.***" You *died*. Sounds pretty serious. Any idea what that means? There are actually two answers to that, and they're both really good news. It means that 1) you died to *Christ*, and 2) you died to *sin*.

I'm sure many of you make financial transactions over the internet, whether it be online shopping or paying your bills online. When that ability to send money over the internet first became a thing, do you remember how wary most of us were in trying it out for ourselves? It's a scary thing when you can't see where your money is going or who it is going to. It's difficult to buy something online without knowing whether it will even show up. Today, I'm sure most of us are much more comfortable buying goods and paying bills online. These days, those kinds of transactions have become much more secure. I don't know exactly how it all works or the right terminology, but to make these financial transactions safer, the institutions apply encryption to your transactions. They apply a complicated code so that only you and the person you're sending money to can access the information.

And it's interesting that the word encryption comes from the same Greek word that Paul uses here when he says, "***Your life is hidden with Christ.***" When you came to faith, the Holy Spirit created a secure connection between you and Christ, locking you to Him. That means you're locked into all the benefits of His life, death, resurrection, and Ascension. Paul says that when Christ died, *you* died. Meaning all of those sins of which you're guilty, all of your failures and disappointments—they were carried to the cross by Jesus. There, He died for them. And there, He released you from them. On the cross, Jesus set you free from the power that your sin had to condemn you.

So, we died *with* Christ! And we also died to sin. As believers, that means that our life isn't about sin anymore. Now that we've been crucified with Christ, we can't go back and sing that old sinful song of the world anymore; now, we are singing the song of heaven. True, we still have our sinful flesh, and it still tempts us every day, trying to draw our attention away from heaven and to the sinful world around us. But as Paul writes in his letter to the Romans: ***"[Know] this, that our old man was crucified with him, that the body of sin might be done away with, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him."*** (Romans 6:6-8) No dead person responds to any outward stimuli, and so Paul encourages you, that when it comes to sin, live life as if you are dead! Without any response to it. And live a life that is tuned into Christ, because you know that this world will soon fade, and that there are far greater pleasures to come.

That brings us to the final verse of our text: ***"When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory."*** Our real life—what's exceptional about you and me—our real life is hidden with Christ. People can't see it now. When you walk through the store, people see you, and you look just like anyone else to them. There's nothing on the surface that's impressive or exceptional. And you know that Jesus was the same way, right? Isaiah writes, ***"He had no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him."*** (Isaiah 53:2) Based on outward appearance, there was nothing special about Jesus.

Except, that wasn't true about Jesus, and it's not true about you either. You are one of the saints of God! You are God's chosen ones, elect and precious! You're part of that small group of people that is locked into Christ, that is awaiting something far more glorious than anything this world can offer. The world didn't understand Jesus, and it won't understand you either. They're looking down. *You* are looking up. Their hearts are tuned with the flat notes of a sinful world. Our hearts are tuned to the glorious life that is to come.

It's a hidden difference now, but the Day is coming when the difference will be obvious to everyone. On Judgment Day, every knee will bow. Christ will appear before everyone as He really is, and so will you! The Apostle John writes: ***"Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore, the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."*** (1 John 3:1-3)

That prospect of entering heaven, meeting face-to-face with our Savior who gave so much for us, that prospect is so wonderful that it gives rise to another emotion: yearning. The more you read and meditate on the eternal glory Christ has won for you, the more it makes you long for that Day to arrive, the more it makes your heart yearn for heaven. And it might seem odd to talk about Christmas in May, but I can't help but think about one of our favorite Christmas hymns: *"Oh, where shall joy be found? Where but on heavenly ground? Where the angels singing With all His saints unite, Sweetest praises bringing In heavenly joy and light. Oh, that we were there! Oh, that we were there!"* Well, we're not there yet. We're not singing with the angels yet, but we will be! And we can start getting tuned up for it right now, **by rejecting the false notes of this sinful world, and by tuning our hearts to the glorious life to come.** One thing we know: **Ascension Day Gives Us the Perfect Pitch!** Amen.