Set your mind on thing on things above…

I would like to begin with re-reading the passage of scripture that this evening's lesson is based upon… **Colossians 3:1-4**

***"1* If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. *2* Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. *3* For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. *4* When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.**

Paul begins this chapter of the Colossian Letter with a wonderfully descriptive passage. It is indeed a message needed by all generations of Christians… but maybe more so to us… I think than maybe to any generation of Christ's body before us. And why is this? Probably the answer lies in the world that we live in... The veil of spiritual darkness and confusion that Satan sows over virtually everything in the world is so complete; that it is hard to find the light if you don't know how. Our world is so connected, so consumer oriented, so competitive, so success driven, so secular, so "me" oriented, and so morally misguided… and all of these things… plus that veil of confusion and darkness, add up to a place that, to the first century mind… would have defied description.

So what kind of a mind-set do all of these factors lead to when faced day in and day out? They lead to a mind that is very focused on immediate gratification of self, immediate results, quick fixes, and fast turn-around. In short it gives one a very worldly view towards life. As a result, many of us have difficulty getting a handle on eternity… or things eternal. It is hard to keep our thoughts there. Or maybe we simply have trouble imagining eternity. The concept is quite foreign to us... its' just not as real to us as the physical world around us. I have to tell you that is the saddest thing that I can conceive of, because eternity is going to be the biggest reality that any of us will ever deal with and we cannot have our heads buried in the sand about it.

Let me ask a question of you this evening… how many of us realize that as of right now… all of us sitting here… and everyone in the world around us… are all immortal in a very real sense? The fact is, when you were conceived in your mother's womb and the Lord imparted to you a spirit, you became unending at the point.

Now I say we are immortal, not eternal… only the Godhead is eternal without beginning and without ending… but at conception <u>we</u> begin and become without ending. Have you thought about that lately? If this is something that is hard for you to grasp or if you don't ever think about it, then you are missing what awaits us beyond this physical world…the spiritual realm… where Christ is seated now at the right hand of the Father. Jesus tells us in **John 4:24** that, "**God is Spirit**…" That realm is just as real… if not more so… than this creation where we have our physical existence, because we know from the Scriptures that creation and all that is created is finite. It will end, but we will not end. Think about that. The world that we are so concerned about on a daily basis is going to be something we deal with for about seventy to eighty years if we are blessed enough to have it so. We will be dealing with the spiritual realm for the rest of eternity… and if you look at the amount of time we will spend here, versus the amount of time we will spend there… doesn't eternity loom much larger than this physical life on earth? Really, I ask you, where should our priorities lie?

Are our views of reality are skewed? If they are, then we must bring our minds into line with the way that the Lord has established things to be. Life on earth is <u>finite</u>… fleeting, life in eternity will be <u>eternal</u>… forever.

In this passage in Colossians the apostle Paul is telling his brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ plainly where their minds are to be. There can be no misunderstanding his message. They are to set their minds on spiritual things, on things in the heavenly places… on the homes that had been

promised to them in the land of their inheritance. As Christians we are to always think on the example we have in Christ… in whom we all have life and who is our way to heaven... This message speaks to us Brethren… we need to listen.

So what does this mean to Christians in practical terms? It means that we all need to focus on our life and growth in Christ… a stunted existence will not do… a stunted existence will not take us to heaven.

Jesus told us in **Matthew 13:22** about how the world can eventually choke the life out of us, when He said this, "**Now he who received seed among the thorns is he who hears the word, and the cares of this world and the deceitfulness of riches choke the word, and he becomes unfruitful.**" We cannot let the confusion, concerns, and the alluring things of the world turn our minds away from Christ… if we do we will die spiritually. It is that simple.

Paul said in **Romans 8:1**, "**There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus,* who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit**." That is a very positive and comforting statement for us, but I would also remind us that the converse of that scripture is equally true. It would read like this: **There is therefore now condemnation to those who walk according to the flesh, but not according to the Spirit.**

This evening I want to present to you several lines of thought… on what we need to be aware of in order to successfully live our lives in Christ, and it is my hope that these will help you…will challenge your thoughts, and give you courage, hope, and peace as we… together… struggle in this place we call the world.

Turn with me now to **Philippians 3:20** and let's read the first six words of this verse… "**For our citizenship is in heaven…**" We see from this short quote of scripture where our loyalties lay… we are citizens of heaven, and we are called to higher things than mere earthly endeavors… our lives… are not defined by our careers… or our hobbies, or even our families. We are subjects and citizens of the kingdom of Christ… which is ruled by Him who is called King of Kings… Lord of Lords, and we are His Body, His servants on earth… and we are called to do His bidding alone.

Now this is a concept that is so foreign to many of us now, in western culture especially. We have no notion of being ruled, in fact our country was born through rebellion to the rule of a king… so the concept of lordship is alien to us. So let me say just this, as most students of history know, the rule of most of the kings in the past… was absolute. The subjects of the kingdom were considered to be the property of the crown, and the king's word was the law of the land. So it is with us… the word of our King, Jesus Christ is the law of the land where our citizenship lies… we have been given the "**law of Christ**", as **Galatians 6:2** refers to the word. The word of Christ is the law of the kingdom, and we must know it and seek to obey it with all our might… just as a vassal would have done for his king in 10th century Europe.

So as citizens of the kingdom of Christ, what are we to do? If our focus is to be on things above, on the spiritual… then we are to put away the blindness of this fleshly world… Turn with me to **Ephesians 4:17&18** which tells us this, "…**you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart...**" As citizens of the kingdom of Christ, we are not to be blind… we are to see things clearly… we are to judge right and wrong without hesitation… We are to see through the veil that Satan sets up for every one of us, that's what this verse is talking about, and we are to see things as they really are… and we are to do the things that are right… as defined for us by the Lord in His word to us. We are to do the will of the King… not our own.

As citizens of heaven, we are to be in the world…we are not to be of this world… we are to be spiritual people. However, this does not mean that we are to withdraw from the world. In **John**

17, our Lord Jesus, prayed for to the Father for us… not that He would take us out of the world, but that He would keep us from the evil one… we cannot do the will of Christ if we take ourselves out of the world… It is the will of our King that we teach the world about Him… showing the Gospel through our lives, through our words… it means doing what He came here to do… seeking to save that which was lost.

The express purpose of the "Great Commission" was to command us as citizens of the kingdom to evangelize to the world… through telling and showing the world around us… that we are different… and when they notice how different we are… we are to tell them why we are different… and we are to help them to see that they can be different, too. We must do this if we are to obey our King…

So, if we are citizens of the kingdom called to be… in the world… but not of the world…if we are called to be spiritual people, then is worldliness OK? Is friendship with the world is OK for us? No, it is not… that is contrary to all that Christ represents. We see from **James 4:4** that friendship with the world "**is enmity with God**"… Some of us may wonder what that means… It means if you are worldly, if your affections and desires are fixed on this world… that you are an enemy of God. That should be a frightening concept for us. We cannot serve two masters… Christ and the world… to try to do so is show unfaithfulness to the Lord and is an example of human thinking… and human thinking is deadly to the spirit.

Let's take a moment and look at a fine example of human thinking… and see how it gets us into trouble…When observing the world… we see that many of our fellow human beings judge sin by degrees… haven't you noticed that? Many think "Well a little white lie is surely not as bad as murder… is it?

Let's look at the "littleness" of Adam and Eve's sin…the first sin. How did sin start out in the world? It started out very "small"... but in reality it was huge. Adam and Eve only had one sin available to them to commit and they sure found a way to commit it, didn't they? All they did was eat a piece of fruit, right? But look at who told them not to eat it… We need to all realize that even the smallest violation of God's commands is gross sinfulness… there is no small sin. Now look at the world we live in… we have wonderful menu of choices in the ways to sin, don't we? See how sin grows? The fact is… the small sin that Adam and Eve committed… has separated mankind from God… In **Genesis 3:17** we are told it caused God to curse creation for our sakes, it caused heaven to be defiled, and it caused God to have to send His Son to die… Sin has exacted a heavy price in our history… more than we can ever realize.

As citizens of the kingdom we need to keep our minds focused on serving the Lord and we need to fight the temptations of worldliness and sin in our lives. The Lord has promised us abundant help with this struggle if we are faithful to Him.

Let's talk for a moment about that struggle and the help that the Lord has promised us. Turn with me to **Ephesians 6:10-13** and let's read what it says: "**Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil. For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore take up the whole armor of God that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."**

In this passage we learn about something that we are all intimately familiar with… the realities of spiritual warfare…the ultimate reality for every citizen of the kingdom of Christ. Mentally we all deal with it. Keep in mind that every citizen of the kingdom of Christ is also called to be a soldier. We have to be, because when we try to live the right way and focus on the right things spiritual warfare is going to go on in our lives. **1 Peter 5:8&9** tells us that diligence, vigilance, and a sober outlook on life is needed because of the cunning of our adversary. We discussed this

earlier…this world is not the ultimate reality… the spiritual world is. Think of this struggle we face every day as being a sort of spiritual boot camp… or training if you will. The harsh reality with any military training program is this …some will make it out of training and will go on to serve… and some will wash out. So it is with the soldiers of Lord, some will go on to serve and some will wash out.

However, the sad truth is that many join the army and will never train to join the fight. We must do all that we can to not be among that number, and our Lord has promised us all of the help we will need if we are faithful to him.

Look in the rest of that passage in **Ephesians 6** about the protection and the weapons we have at our disposal, **the shield of faith, the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the helmet of salvation, the sword of the Spirit, feet shod with the gospel of peace**… we need to put on our armor daily, for it offers ample protection, and we need to wear it deliberately… for it bears the stamp of our King and is our only hope against the spiritual adversaries we face. Spiritual warfare is one of the most serious obstacles we must face as Christians and we must be successful at it, we must not give up or give in, no matter what the cost.

We have talked a lot about the citizenship we have in heaven… and about what the Lord expects of us as spiritually minded people… However because we cannot exhaust this subject tonight… I want to leave this topic with some evaluation questions for all of us… myself included.

Revelation 1:5 tells us that we have been made to be priests and kings before God through Jesus Christ. Do we show ourselves to be the priests and kings that we have been made to be before God through Christ? Do we have the mind of a priest before God? We should because we are His priests. Many in the secular religious world are confused over the issue of who is a priest… God's word tells us that all Christians are priests, every one of them.

Do we show ourselves as kings before God, ruling and reigning through the showing of the Gospel at work in our lives at all times. Are we living worthy of this honor in Christ? Do we think about the fact that we are saints before God? Do we even think like that? From a spiritual standpoint this is what we are! This is how we need to think! Do we show the mind of priest in all that we do, do we show the actions of kingship in our everyday lives, do we show the spiritual strength and of characteristics of saints in our lives? Brethren we must do this… our souls depend on us recognizing these very real spiritual truths… we must keep our minds on things above, and realize that we have a place there, and it requires all our focus. Partial focus will not secure the blessings of our citizenship in heaven.

I would like to close with making my last points quickly… In **John 16:33**… our Lord said this to His disciples, "**These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world."** We are always going to have struggles in this world, and some of them will be downright hard. These tribulations may take many different forms… we know of many among our number that have struggled with persecution, disease, failing health, all types of heartache, and even the death of loved ones. But this world is not a thing that we need to be afraid of… if our hearts and minds are in the right place. Our Lord has made it clear to us that through Him we can have victory in our struggles… and that we can overcome the world just as He did… we can have peace in Him when we remain in Him and serve Him with all our hearts. For you see unlike an earthly King, He has the power to protect us from anything, to always provide the victory, and He loves us more than we will ever know while on this earth.

Colossians 3:15 begins with these words… "**And let the peace of God rule in your hearts…**" I love that phrase because of what it means to me… in the original Greek language of the New Testament the words "peace" and "rule" used in this passage have greater significance than they do in our everyday English vocabulary… in the Greek they mean literally that we can have the tranquility of God in our minds… by letting the word of God arbitrate between our thoughts…

that is a lovely thought isn't it? God has promised us peace in Jesus Christ through our obedience… through our taking of His word into our minds and obeying it.

Our obedience also brings rewards to us, our Lord Jesus tells us in **John 14:1-4** this wonderful revelation… "**Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.**"

There is a place prepared for us in heaven… a place prepared for us by the King Himself… a beautiful place where we will have a complete cessation from all of the hostilities of this life… no more persecution for our faith, no more struggles with sin, no more guilt, no more disease, and no more death… a place of rewards and great treasure… a place to dwell forever in the light that comes from the Heavenly Father… and His precious Son Jesus Christ.

We must keep our minds focused on things above if we would have this be our eternal reality, and we must serve the Lord faithfully until death… if we do He has promised us a crown of victory and of everlasting life in Him.

We have spoken tonight about what the Lord expects of Christians and about what Christians can expect for their faithfulness. If you are not a Christian however, you cannot begin to do what the Lord expects of you, and you cannot lay claim to the eternal rewards that He has so lovingly promised… if you are not a Christian then the hope of heaven is not yours. The way to become a Christian is easy… very easy, but life as a Christian will have its' difficulties. However only those who overcome the difficulties will have eternal life. One becomes a Christian when one has faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior, repents of their sins and is put into Christ. This is accomplished through the act of baptism… immersion in water for the remission of sins… **Romans 6:3** and **Acts 2:38** … only then does the Lord take you into His possession as His subject… **Matthew 28:19**… only then are you a citizen of the kingdom of heaven… if you would do this tonight won't you come now…