

New Year's Sunday Sermon

*Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth.
(Colossians 3:2 ESV)*

SLIDE 1

Resolve to Live the Jesus Way

January 3rd, 2021

Colossians 3:1-17

Dr Matthew Stanton

Introduction:

Good morning everyone! I hope you have your Bibles handy and that you are able to open it now to Colossians 3. The title of this message is “Resolve to Live the Jesus Way”. This is of course the first Sunday of the new year 2021. We all come with expectations for what the new year will bring. Some of us even create what’s known as New Year’s Resolutions. How many of you have tuned in this morning already having made your list of new year’s resolutions? These resolutions are the things that we hope to work toward throughout the year so that this year will be different, and indeed better, than the last. They can be goals such as losing weight, saving enough for the down payment of a house, or seeing the 7 wonders of the world. But what should the goals/resolutions of the Christian be? If we are to be in the world but not of it, then what goals should we resolve to attain?

And so, this morning we want to look at some biblical new year’s resolutions for the believer. There is perhaps no better passage to address this topic than Colossians 3 and so hear now the Word of the Lord beginning at verse 1:

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Colossians 3:1-17 Put On the New Self

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.

SLIDE 3 (If this is too much text for one slide, feel free to split it up into 2 slides)

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.

SLIDE 4 (If this is too much text for one slide, feel free to split it up into 2 slides)

¹² Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. ¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. ¹⁵ And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:1–17 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God!

I want to submit to you this morning that this passage elicits 7 RESOLUTIONS for the Christian. These resolutions are applicable to EVERY believer because these resolutions are for those who are of THE JESUS WAY. And so we will, by the grace of God, divide the text accordingly.

Resolve to Live the Jesus Way

If we are going to start this year off the Jesus way, then the first resolution we must have is to:

SLIDE 5

1. Resolve to Keep Your Eyes Up

You can see that in verses 1 and 2:

SLIDE 6

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. (Colossians 3:1-2 ESV)

Now, the opening here: “if then you have been raised with Christ”, is referring to born again believers. Here, Paul is talking to those Christians in Colossae who have “been raised with Christ”. You’ll recognize this language from our baptism services. “You were raised with him” refers to our new birth in Christ, symbolized by our baptism: when we were buried with Christ and raised with him through faith. This is not just figurative language. Paul is speaking of actual spiritual changes that took place in us when we repented of our sins and received Christ into our lives. This concept of death with Christ occurred just a few verses earlier in chapter 2 verse 20:

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Since you died with Christ to the basic principles of this world, why, as though you still belonged to it, do you submit to its rules. (Colossians 2:20 ESV)

We have a new nature as Christians and that nature needs to be cultivated. Why should you set your mind on the things of God? Because your old life is dead, and your new life is now found only in Christ. He is your present and your future! That’s how the text continues:

SLIDE 8

For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:3-4 ESV)

We have been “hidden” which is the word *kryptō* (from which we get the word “crypt”), quite literally meaning to keep from being seen. This hiddenness will finally be revealed when Christ returns in Glory. So, now we are covered with Christ.

THEREFORE: Resolve to think often about the new heaven and new earth; the total defeat of sin and death, when every tear will be wiped from your eyes; and your joy completed in the presence of Christ. Doing this will renew your mind to see through God’s eternal perspective. It will help you discern what is most important and will make the trials of earth seem light and momentary in comparison to the great glory that is to come.

To “seek the things that are above” is to live in anticipation of eternity. There has been so much going on AROUND us this past year that maybe we’ve let our gaze fall- and with it falling, we have given the things of this world too much consideration. Living the Jesus way means having your priorities straight. Paul and Timothy, our authors here, got this.

The second thing the text tells us is that we need to:

SLIDE 9

2. Resolve to Put Sin Down

Keep our eyes up and then put sin down. We see that in verses 5 and 6:

SLIDE 10

Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. (Colossians 3:5-6 ESV)

The great teacher of the church on this doctrine of dealing with our sin is Puritan John Owen. Nobody has probed it more deeply, probably. He wrote a little 86-page book called *Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656). “Mortify” means “kill” in 17th century English. Today it just means “embarrass” or “shame” which loses some of the weightiness of the phrase. But Owen used this word “mortify” to aid his explanation of Romans 8:13. In fact, his book, *Mortification of Sin*, was in essence a lengthy exposition of this verse.

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“For if you live according to the flesh you will die, but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.” (Romans 8:13 ESV)

And so, in his commentary Owen famously said,

SLIDE 12

“Be killing sin or it will be killing you.”¹

So, if we are going to resolve to live the Jesus way this year then we need to deal with our sin. We need to identify it, kill it, and WATCH that it doesn’t spring up again.

¹ See: John Owen, *Mortification of Sin in Believers* (1656), chapter 2.

Paul then gives a list of sins that we need to be aware of or else they'll be killing us.

Look with me at verses 5-8:

SLIDE 13

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. (Colossians 3:5-8 ESV)

The “earthly” in us is sin. Sexual sin, a desire for evil and idolatry are all sins that we “once walked” in. You’ll notice that that’s past tense for the believer. Before we were made one with Christ, we walked a certain sinful way, BUT NOW we are to walk differently. And look at how specific Paul gets here: “you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk.” If Christians have already died and risen again with Christ, whatever belongs to your earthly nature must be put to death.

Resolve this year to kill sin, show it no mercy and devote yourself to its complete destruction. Identify the factors, people, and situations that trigger temptations and potential sin, and decide in your heart to flee from them. This resolution glorifies God, who spent his wrath upon his own Son so that you could be free from sin’s eternal grip and consequences. You were bought with a price.

The third thing the Apostle Paul tells the believers at Colossae is:

SLIDE 14

3. Resolve to Put on the Character of Christ

You can see that in verses 12-14:

SLIDE 15

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, ¹³ bearing with one another and, if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you,

so you also must forgive.¹⁴ And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony. (Colossians 3:12-14 ESV)

You'll notice here that the mood changes. The opposite side of killing sin is the pursuit of holiness, motivated by our identity as God's chosen children. We must put on the character of Christ. Just as putting sin to death is active, so is the putting on of the fruits of the Holy Spirit, who gives us the power to do so. We've taken off our old shabby clothes and have been fitted with new, beautiful robes.

As God's chosen ones, the church is God's true Israel, to whom has been transferred that which formerly belonged to Israel according to the flesh. Christians are God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved. God has assured them in Christ of their membership as His people. They have been set apart for his service. A service which does not depend on their goodness but on His grace. Resolve this year to honour Christ and his transformative gospel by showing that you belong to God's family.

We just did a series here through the letters of John called That You May Know and so this sermon could have been called That You May Show. Bear with one another as brothers and sisters apart of one family. Pursuing holiness is a matter of living a life dedicated to God AND loving one another. With Christ as our example we are to love and care to each other as we pursue God.

How are you doing with loving on each other? Or better yet, how WILL you commit to loving one another?

Choose to walk in love each day, through God's power and the effectiveness of his Word. And when you fail, remember anew that your identity as God's beloved child is sure and steadfast, that nothing can snatch you out of his hand.

The fourth thing Paul says flows right of out the next verse. He says the Christian is to be thankful. So, this year:

SLIDE 16

4. Resolve to be thankful

Verse 15:

SLIDE 17

And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body. And be thankful. (Colossians 3:15 ESV)

The fruit of a life of holiness IS the peace of Christ ruling in our hearts! There is no better way to live than under the good protection of God's Word and ways. The peace of Christ naturally pours over into an attitude of thankfulness, as we realize that we've been given much more than we deserve, by God's grace in the gospel. Resolve to be thankful this year for earthly blessings and spiritual ones, for both come from God's endless store of goodness and wisdom.

The Christian's heart is overwhelmed by the peace of Christ. That is because we are apart of the one body- the bride of Christ- the church. So be thankful.

And I hope that this attitude of thankfulness is evident in our interactions and in our prayers. Maybe this year we can pray a little less about things we want and a little more about things we have. We are no doubt a needy people, so we better be a thankful people! The undertone of the Christian life is thankfulness to God.

Once a month we have a pastoral fellowship lunch with some of the local pastors. And at these lunches we have a devotional time led by Tim Kerr who some of you will know. At our October meeting we talked about being thankful. One of the exercises Tim had us do at the end was to pray prayers of thankfulness where we couldn't ask God for anything; we could only pray for the things we were thankful for. And to be honest it was kind of hard. For every thought that I had about being thankful, there was another that I wanted to pray into. For example, "God, thank you for blessing us as a church with such faithful volunteers. I pray that you'd bless them as they serve." But wait, that's me asking God for something. It's a good something, sure, but I'm not resting in that thankfulness. There's always something more. But does there have to be? Can't I be thankful for the incredible volunteers here, period? I'll restate that more generally; can't we be more thankful in our prayers and interactions with each other simply because of the realization of how incredibly blessed we are?

When you think about it, we have no hope or trust in this world. All we have is from God. Remember, we haven't set our minds on these earthly things, but on things above. So we live with grateful hearts.

The fifth resolution is:

SLIDE 18

5. Resolve to read and meditate on the Scriptures

This year let us grow in our love for God's Word. That's what Paul admonishes the people at Colossae to do next. Look with me at verse 16:

SLIDE 19

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16 ESV)

One of the first verses you may have memorized is John 3:16, but have you memorized Colossians 3:16? You should. This verse is critical to the one who wants to live this year the Jesus way. Those of this Jesus way have the Word of God in them. That's what it means to let the word of Christ dwell in you.

Pastorally, I should say that we may have a problem if you can recite more lines from your favourite movie than verses from Holy Scripture. How much time do you spend watching those movies? Now, compare that to how much time you spend in the Word of God- letting it dwell in you. How can we know what sin is, who we are as God's beloved children, or what the fruit of the Holy Spirit is if we do not read and meditate on God's revealed Word to us? The Scriptures illuminate spiritual realities and light our paths to walk in the truth of Christ's gospel.² All of the Word of God is sufficient for salvation AND is relevant for our daily lives.

Resolve to soak in your Bible every day this year, in order that it becomes an unbreakable habit, knowing that, by doing so, you are hearing God speak His will into your life and you are growing closer to Him. You're pursuing holiness. I know that's a big goal, but we have resources here at

² Psalm 119:105

the church to help you. I mean that's why we launched Into the Word: a DAILY Bible reading program. We as Christians need to get reading our Bibles again. Grandma and Grampa understood that; mom and dad knew that; but we've lost that.

There's another resolution for us, a sixth resolution, here in verse 16. That is:

SLIDE 20

6. Resolve to be a part of a worshipping community

Let me read that verse for us again:

SLIDE 21

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God. (Colossians 3:16 ESV)

See, Paul tells the church to let the Gospel dwell in their hearts, and then he expands to give them some context. He says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, [as you] teach and admonish one another." Well how do you do that if not in community?

This year, if you have not yet landed at a local church, resolve to do so! The local church is called the body of Christ for a reason: it is a living, breathing demonstration of the grace of Christ to the world. A world which -by the way- takes note of our love for one another and for putting Christ's glory on display through our varied gifts and service and our commitment to the Word of Christ.

Believers who remain isolated from the local church are missing out on a great and glorious gift! In the safety and structure of the God-ordained local church, believers teach the gospel, receive the gospel, and spur one another on in gospel-centred living with accountability to God-fearing leadership (Ephesians 3:14-19). Outside of this structure, there is a greater risk for straying from the true gospel and for letting spiritual gifts of service go unexercised. So, commit to a local church this year!

Perhaps you need to make this your local church and join this body of gathered believers. Talk to me about becoming a member and let us walk alongside you and help you live the Jesus way in 2021.

Further we need to, as verse 16 tells us, worship God through song.

We aren't just to let the Word of Christ dwell richly in us, though it must. Just as we aren't just to join with a body of believers to teach and admonish each other in all wisdom, which we should. Paul lands here to say, "We need to be worshippers then of Christ". Because we have resolved to be thankful in our hearts, we are to be worshippers.

You may notice that this isn't the only verse in the Scriptures which speaks about the necessity of singing God's praises. I think immediately of Ephesians 5:18-19:

SLIDE 22

And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit,¹⁹ addressing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody to the Lord with your heart, (Ephesians 5:18-19 ESV)

That's because it wasn't just the church at Colossae which needed reminding to sing, but the church in Ephesus also needed to be reminded that being filled with the Spirit leads to singing the praises of God. Notice here that singing is a command from Scripture, and no command of God stands apart from his divine purpose for your good and his glory. Singing is one of the ways in which the Word of Christ dwells richly in us. Singing not only glorifies our Father, who is deserving of all our worship and praise, but it completes our joy in him, as we express his awesomeness and set our eyes on things above. So, sing, Christian! Sing with all the strength your vocal cords can muster!

Now as I say all this, I realise that we are in lockdown. And so, we aren't singing together, and we aren't even meeting together. So how then do we practically live out this resolution? Well, here are a couple of helpful suggestions: First, with regards to singing, sing with your families at home. Family devotionals are great times to teach our kids how to live and love the Jesus way. Make singing a part of this time. Secondly, sing with us as you are watching these services. Church isn't a spectator sport. And just because we aren't together, doesn't mean you have to stop worshipping. In fact, it's the opposite. When you stop worshipping, then we have a problem. It is then that you've let culture dictate your faith and how you will practice it. Don't use these restrictions as an excuse to stop worshipping God through song. Instead, let this time be one of personal revival.

The gods, small ‘g’, that the world chooses to worship will ultimately fail them. But the worship of the one true God will ultimately lead to eternal life. And that leads us directly to our final resolution:

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7. Resolve to glorify Christ.

Verse 17:

SLIDE 24

And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him. (Colossians 3:17 ESV)

This might be the hardest resolution because it is so all encompassing. “Whatever we do” is everything we do. That’s hard to stick by because our sinful hearts are prone to set ourselves on the throne of our own lives, idolizing self-glory, self-worship, and selfish pursuits. How is it possible then for us to “do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus”? How is it possible for us to follow through on any of the above resolutions?

Here is our means and our motivation. It comes from earlier in the text, up in verse 4:

SLIDE 25

When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. (Colossians 3:4 ESV)

Do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus because if you are in Him, then when he returns you will appear with Him in glory! Eternal life with God is your future; therefore, glorify Him now in the present.

And it’s not by our own will that we can resolve to pursue Christ this year and certainly not by our own strength. (80% of people give up on their resolutions by February- by February.) If you are “gonna try this Jesus way out”, well I have news for you, it won’t work. It is only by the gift of God’s grace poured out through the gospel of Christ that we can do anything of eternal value. It will only be by the help, guidance, and power of the Holy Spirit that we can set our minds on things above (1), (2) kill the sin in our lives, (3) put on love, (4) be thankful, (5) delight in our Bibles, and (6) commit to a local worshipping church body that seeks to (7) glorify Christ.

Only by the very life of Christ can we die to ourselves, take up our crosses, and follow him, this year and every year until he appears in the fullness of glory.

Conclusion

And that's where we'll land this morning by way of conclusion.

What are you, Christian striving for? What are your New Year's resolutions going to be? Will Christ be at the centre of your life? If he's not at the centre than he's in the wrong place. It's like how in our solar system everything is perfectly balanced and in the right place. Meaning, you can't take out the Sun and replace it with Jupiter; there would be chaos (and it would be very cold right now). If you've replaced Christ, the cornerstone with ANYTHING else; this year -your world- will be chaos.

So, let's START this year with Christ at the centre. We don't know what will happen to us this year, what we may have to endure or even if we'll see 2022. So, there's a sense of urgency that I don't want us to miss. It's not necessarily in the text itself but you can definitely see it in the historical context of this letter. This sense of urgency was the reality for the people at Colossae who first received this letter. Did you know that they received this letter sometime in 61 or 62 AD and shortly thereafter the entire city was destroyed? They only had this letter for a number of months before the entire city was consumed by a massive earthquake. The ruins still haven't been excavated to this day. So, they didn't have a lot of time to decide if they were going to live the Jesus way. Thankfully, as it appears from Paul's letter, they were a saved people, and we'll meet them in glory. But what a warning? What a call for urgency? Today is the today.

So stay. Remain. Abide. Abide in Him and he in you and you will bear much fruit. NOW; in the FUTURE; and FOREVER because THIS is the Jesus way and this is the way of the true believer, and this is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God! Let's pray together.