

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

He grabbed the mail as he walked in the door. As he plopped it down on the table, one the letters immediately caught his attention. It was from a law office and looked very important, but he'd been fooled by important looking envelopes before. Most of them turned out to be junk mail, so with a healthy dose of skepticism, he opened the letter. He was speechless. The letter stated that he had inherited two million dollars from his recently deceased great uncle's estate. Still, he was skeptical, so he went down to see the lawyer whose name was on the document, and sure enough it was legitimate. The lawyer did, however point out something that he had missed when he read it the first time. The money was tied up in certain investments which couldn't be liquidated. He would have to wait for five years. He rushed home to tell his wife and his family. He shared the news with close friends. It was a life-changing event. Still, those five years of waiting were not without challenges. He still had to go to his job. The family still had to live in their meager house. There were days when he came home from work at his wit's end, frustrated with the people there, and his wife would have to remind him. "Don't worry, remember the two million? Just a few more years!" "Thanks, he would say – sometimes I just get caught up in the moment and forget." Other times his wife became frustrated with their home and its leaky roof, its drafty windows, and gaudy wallpaper. "We've got to do something about this house!" She would say, and he would remind her, "Remember the five million? Just a few more years and we won't have to live here anymore." "Thanks," she would say, "it's so easy to forget. Sometimes it just seems so far away!" As far as I know, none us here this morning has received that kind of inheritance. But each one of us here has inherited something far more valuable: A place in heaven with Jesus, life after death. But like that family, we have to wait to experience the full extent of those blessing, and in the meantime, our life here is not without its challenges. Suffice it to say, it is easy to become distracted, to forget the value of what we have inherited. The words before us this morning are reminder – much like the reminders that the husband and wife gave to help each other keep things in perspective. God through his apostle, Paul, with the reminder of our life-changing inheritance.

Colossians 3:1-4 Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 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.

The Christians in the congregation at Colossae had become distracted. They were losing perspective. Now it hadn't been all that long ago that they had first heard that Jesus of Nazareth was God's promised messiah - that his death paid the price for the world's sins, and that by rising from the dead, he had won them a home in heaven. At first they embraced the message, but soon other preachers came along who told them it wasn't true and so they had to endure the painstaking process of separating truth from lies. As you can imagine this would have resulted in strained and broken relationships. I would suppose that many people in that congregation were exhausted, fatigued with some of the others at that congregation. Maybe it isn't so surprising that they have begun to gravitate back to the way they had been living before they ever heard of Jesus. Maybe some felt like they just needed a break from all the "Jesus" stuff and the "church" stuff. Paul, one of their founding pastors, is concerned. He calls on them to remember the value of what they had inherited. In verse one he says, "**You have been raised with Christ...**" and in verse four "**When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.**"

It's as if Paul was grabbing them by the shoulders, looking them straight in the eye and saying, "You have a home waiting for you in heaven, remember?" "You are going to come back from the dead, remember? That's huge! That's death-changing!" And that reminder isn't just for the Christians in Colossae thousands of years ago. It's for us. You and I are going to come back from the dead and live forever in the glories of heaven with Jesus. You and I are going to come back from the dead. That's still huge! But how often is that really at the forefront of our minds? How often is that the driving truth in our lives? Well, it is when death gets close to us. When mom or dad passes away, when that high school classmate dies in a car accident, yes then we think about heaven and coming back from the dead. Then we think about heaven and we truly appreciate that Jesus' resurrection is death-changing. Or maybe we have a personal brush with death—the car accident that nearly kills us. The cancer is caught before it spreads. But how often do those things happen in a lifetime—maybe a dozen, if that? And then how long does it take for our focus on death and life after death to fade into the background?

Like the Christians in Colossae, it's easy for us to forget the home waiting for us and the life waiting for us after we die and to be consumed and distracted by the right here and now. Are you a student? What's on your mind right now? Exams, graduation, summer vacation, baseball schedule, softball schedule, part-time job schedule, graduation parties, college enrolment? Are you an adult in the work-a-day world? What does your calendar look like? How many work appointments? How many rides to practice, how many games or performances will you attend in the next weeks? Do you have a confirmation or graduation party to prepare for? How's your 401K doing? Making any plans for a vacation this

summer? There is so much going on in day-to-day life – it's easy to lose sight of the death-changing message of Jesus' resurrection. And do you know what, that can even be true in church! Look at the church calendar – meetings to attend, small groups gathering, meals to prepare, songs to rehearse, classes to teach, budgets to prepare, future plans to make – and while all of them are intended to help us put our focus on Christ, even in church we can become distracted by the details and forget the death-changing message of Jesus' resurrection. And guess what, it can even happen on Easter Sunday – if it's all about the new outfits and the yummy breakfasts, or family get-together, or the numbers that attend church, or the beauty of the music – even on this Sunday we can lose our focus on the death-changing message of Jesus' resurrection. So easily we forget that we are all one day nearer to the day of our death. So easily we forget that sin – our sin – damns us. So easily we forget how much we need a savior whose actions are death-changing.

And so this morning, I just want you to let these words sink in. Whether you are hearing them for the very first time or whether you are hearing them for the thousandth, just pause for a second and reflect on them. **You have been raised with Christ ... When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.** That is the reason why we are here this morning. That death-changing truth is why we celebrate. It's why we sing. It's why we dress up. We are going to come back to life after we die and meet each other in heaven. That is the heart and soul of the Christian faith. But what about tomorrow? What about the next day? Students - it's back to school, back to exams, back to graduation, back to jobs. Parents, it's back to work, back to driving kids around, back to appointments, back to cooking and cleaning and yard work and baseball games and fishing and vacations. Church members, it's back to meetings, back to future plans, back to teaching, back to maintenance. But don't let the death-changing truth of Easter fade away until next year, or until your next close encounter with death. No, the truth isn't just death-changing, it's life changing.

Paul writes, **Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.** He doesn't just stop after saying that we have been raised with Christ, he says do something with it: **set your hearts on things above, and set your minds on things above.** Go back to the illustration of inheriting the five million. That husband and wife kept reminding each other about their future - why? Because it gave them the perspective to help them get through some of the difficulties and frustrations of the present.

So what does it look like when the death-changing message of Jesus' resurrection leads us to set our hearts and minds on things above? Does it mean that we don't think about this life at all, that we stop working and going to school, and buying things, and going to parties, and going on vacations? No. But as we do, they are no longer our prime focus, no longer our obsession in life.

So students, what does it look like to set your hearts and minds on things above? Study hard, not to impress people, not to outshine others, but so that you will have even more skills with which to serve God until you reach your real home in heaven. And know that along the way if you don't get accepted into this or that school, if you end up making less money than you hoped, if school is difficult and painful for you – don't let it consume you. You still have a home in heaven. You are still coming back from the dead, and none of that will matter then. Adults, what does it look like for us to set our hearts and minds on things above? It's OK for our schedule to be full. But if little Johnny doesn't make the ball team or Jane doesn't get a full ride, or the house and paycheck are smaller than your high school classmates', you do not need to be consumed by it as if somehow that makes you less of a person. Nor is it the case that if you have all of those things, that makes you more of a person. In either case – you have been raised with Christ. You will appear with him in glory. Church members, as we plan, as we meet, as we hold services, as we rehearse, as we teach and preach, as we give, as we gather with other Christians, and we reach out to those who are not, we do not have to be consumed or burdened with guilt because a plan didn't turn out, or a song didn't go quite right, or we didn't reach this or that numerical target. We have been raised with Christ; we will appear with him in glory. We don't have to worry. We don't need to be stressed out. We can live in the freedom and security of a certain future.

But understand this, when the death-changing becomes life-changing, that will make you different. Your priorities will be different from many around you. They won't understand why you would decline a promotion because moving would have put you too far from a bible teaching church. They won't understand why you would give up a week's vacation to chaperone a mission trip. They won't understand why you would spend such a beautiful morning in a church building. They won't understand why the faith of the person you are dating matters to you. For so many, the life changes of a Christian don't make sense because they seem to be losing out in some way, whether financially or in respect to leisure time, or freedom. Paul addresses that, too. He writes, **for you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God.** That's why those around you won't always understand. The glory that is and will be yours isn't visible yet. We can't show our friends pictures of heaven. It isn't featured on any travel shows. A real estate agent can't give you a tour. It is still hidden, but it is very much real. And so is the peace in life that comes with it, and it's ours right here and now, and all because Jesus rose on Easter morning. Never forget – never forget that what we celebrate today is life-changing, because it's death-changing. AMEN.