

Colossians 3:1-11

Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

⁵So put to death whatever is worldly in you: sexual immorality, uncleanness, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. ⁶It is because of these things that the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience. ⁷You too once walked in these things, when you were living in them.

⁸But now, you too are to rid yourselves of all of these: wrath, anger, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to each other since you have put off the old self with its practices, ¹⁰and put on the new self, which is continually being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of its Creator. ¹¹Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but rather Christ is all and is in all.

Set Your Mind on Things Above

I.

Long before he ever had the opportunity to say the words he understood that this would be one of the most iconic phrases ever uttered. He contemplated exactly what he would say. It was important to get it right. It was to be a moment unlike any other moment in human history. The words he spoke would be there for posterity.

For decades people said he messed up the words. He insisted that *he* was there. *He* knew exactly what he said—he had planned it, and spoke the words just as he intended to do. Others insisted he skipped a word.

A team from Michigan State University carefully analyzed speech patterns from the place the man was raised. They came to the conclusion that two words were consistently blended together from his home area, and that was probably what happened.

Another researcher carefully analyzed the recording using a computer. He discovered a 35 millisecond-long bump of sound that contained the missing word—the word “a.”

The iconic phrase was spoken 50 years ago. Neil Armstrong always insisted he had said the whole planned phrase. Some researchers agree, others disagree, but what he intended to say, and what he insisted he *did* say, was: “That’s one small step for *a* man, one giant leap for mankind.”

All the world was looking up. The whole world was interested in the moon high above the earth and the crew that had landed on the surface. “That’s one small step for *a* man, one giant leap for mankind.” Whether Armstrong said what he meant to say or botched the line, everyone knows that the epic event that surrounded the sentence was a stunning achievement for the human race. Literally billions of people have been affected by that achievement. So many things were developed or improved because of the space program. The effects are still felt and being expanded on today.

II.

Without doubt, the most epic failure for mankind happened in the Garden of Eden. Mankind deserted godly ways to follow the whisperings of a serpent and plunged the whole world from perfection into ruin.

Billions of people have been affected. Many, many billions of people. Every human being who has ever lived has been affected by the one human disaster of following the advice of

Satan that we could be like God. Sin separated from God. Trying to be like God meant that Adam and Eve and all their descendants had a broken relationship with God.

Paul reminded his readers of that relationship several weeks ago. He reminded the Colossian Christians: “At one time, you were alienated from God and hostile in your thinking as expressed through your evil deeds” (Colossians 1:21, EHV).

Paul says in today’s lesson: “So put to death whatever is worldly in you: sexual immorality, uncleanness, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry” (Colossians 3:5, EHV). The things that alienate people from God are not the things that are above. The things that alienate people from God are earthly things, worldly things, sinful things.

The actions of Adam and Eve were sinful. They broke their relationship with God. Rifts in any relationship have long-term consequences. A damaged relationship in a marriage often results in divorce. Broken relationships between siblings, or between a parent and child, often means that the two parties don’t speak to one another for many years. Sometimes they *never* heal their relationship.

“It is because of these things that the wrath of God is coming on the sons of disobedience” (Colossians 3:6, EHV). A broken relationship with God means something far worse than just not speaking to a loved one for many years. A broken relationship with God means the wrath of God is coming.

“So put to death whatever is worldly in you: sexual immorality, uncleanness, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry...⁸But now, you too are to rid yourselves of all of these: wrath, anger, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. ⁹Do not lie to each other” (Colossians 3:5, 8-9, EHV).

The first sin was the sin of idolatry. Adam and Eve wanted to be like God. *Every* sin can be traced to that same origin. *Every* sin is, ultimately, idolatry. Whether have a conscious desire of wanting to be like God or not, every sin listed by Paul in these verses and any other sin you can think of is idolatry, because every time we sin we place our desires on a higher pedestal than God.

III.

Adam and Eve’s sin was one giant leap backwards for mankind—away from what God wanted for us and into a never-ending cesspool of sin.

“That’s one small step for a man, one giant leap for mankind.” Neal Armstrong’s phrase, no matter how it *really* was said, was one of the most iconic phrases in history. It was heard by hundreds of millions of people, and preserved in audio and video for the generations who lived since.

Many centuries earlier another figure uttered the most important phrase that ever has been or ever will be uttered on this earth. Well, *we* call it a phrase, anyway. In the language the man used while hanging on the cross it was only one word. Tetelestai. In English the word is a phrase: “it is finished.”

Not only was it the most important phrase ever uttered, it was the most giant leap for mankind ever made. From all eternity Jesus sat at the right hand of God. He *is* God. He is subject to no one and to nothing. He is the very Word by which the Creator made all things.

Our Lord Jesus made the giant leap to come down to his creation to save mankind, who had followed the whisperings of the serpent in Eden. There were no television sets to tune in to the event. Most of mankind was oblivious to the cosmic battle going on for their very souls.

The true final battle began with not so much as a whimper when the angel informed

Mary she would have a Son. While the birth was trumpeted by a majestic angelic choir, only a few shepherds took note and came to see what was going on. Magi came to visit, and King Herod tried to destroy the combatant before he could complete his work, but without success.

For his whole life Jesus lived without sin, carrying on the battle daily as Satan tried desperate attempt after desperate attempt to spoil God's plan for the giant leap that would save mankind. If he could tempt Jesus into one small step into sin, the plan would be foiled.

Day after day the battle continued. The 40 days of tempting Jesus in the wilderness came and went. Judas made his deal with the Chief Priests to sell out his Master. Jesus' prayers in Gethsemane were answered by God showing him this *still* was the way that must be taken. The soldiers came. The disciples fled. The Savior bled.

There he hung. On the cross. The last part of the battle nearly over. And when he had won, there was a one-word phrase so iconic it shook heaven and earth itself. The sun stopped shining for a moment. The curtain dividing the Most Holy Place from the rest of the temple tore in two, from top to bottom.

With no cameras to record it, the most important phrase ever spoken in the history of mankind was uttered. Tetelestai. "It is finished."

IV.

That most-important phrase is what makes everything about your life as a Christian so rich and meaningful. That phrase, and the epic battle behind it, didn't just create all kinds of research and creature comforts for you to enjoy in *this* world—it changed your *eternal* future.

"Therefore, because you were raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. ²Set your mind on things above, not on earthly things. ³For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:1-2, EHV).

Those worldly things Paul said to get rid of are things that are inconsequential to the new self. The temptations of sin bring only disaster; the wrath of God.

"You too once walked in these things, when you were living in them" (Colossians 3:7, EHV). But now, because you heard the phrase that rocked the universe, "Tetelestai," you know better. You want something better. You want things that don't perish, spoil, or fade. You want something that lasts and lasts. Something that lasts even longer than a lifetime. Something that lasts for *eternity*.

"You have put off the old self with its practices, ¹⁰and put on the new self, which is continually being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of its Creator" (Colossians 3:9-10, EHV). Live in the new self. Live as one who understands that your broken relationship with God was healed when the word tetelestai rocked the universe.

"Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcision or uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but rather Christ is all and is in all" (Colossians 3:11, EHV). Here—in Christianity—in the reality that Christ has taken care of the sin problem that broke your relationship with God—is the special ability to live as a child of God.

"Christ is all." Christ Jesus is the foundation and focus for everything we do as believers. "Christ is in all." Christ is the One who provides the desire and the ability to live a new life of faith.

It is Christ and his epic phrase tetelestai—"it is finished"—that makes it possible to set your mind on things above. Heaven is yours. Heaven is waiting. When your Lord Jesus is ready for you to join him, he'll let you know. Until then, keep your mind on things above. Amen.