



Series: Colossians: Before All Things

Date: February 4, 2024

Speaker: Pastor Spence Shelton, Lead Pastor

Text: Colossians 3:1-3:11

Title:

PRE Sermon-Stuff - Starting Point & Elders - 4 min

Good morning mercy family! I'm excited to preach this weekend from our Mercy Northeast Campus! Praise God for what he is doing here. If you are new with us, my family and I belong to the Mercy Providence Rd Campus so that's where I usually am, but we are one church that worships in 3 locations each weekend and it's my joy to worship here today and I look forward to being with union county in the future. Hey, you saw that video about Starting point...

Man, what I want you to hear with that video is that we believe God created you to belong. To have a relationship with him and with his church family. We recognize people come to Mercy in all different kinds of places in their walk with God. Some are coming in from other cities and churches and some of you are new to church. Just had a guy last week & it was his first time in any kind of protestant church. We hear that kind of thing regularly. So, Starting Point is a short orientation to who Mercy Church is. You'll hear our mission, vision, & values and get the chance to ask some questions to pastors & leaders in our church. And we know we aren't the church for everybody, but we hope we can be the church for anybody so starting point helps you figure out if this is the right fit for you.

Now, let me talk to those of you who've already gone through all that. If you are a member here at Mercy, I have some exciting family business to share. TODAY is the opening day for new elder recommendations. Elders are the leaders of the church, and we take that role really seriously. Well, our current body of elders are ready and excited to begin assessing and training additional elders. And the way we do that is YOU, the members of mercy, recommend those men you think are qualified for the role. You can go to mercycharlotte.com/elders to see the process.

BUT - here's one thing I'll go ahead and say. Before you recommend someone YOU, the recommender, have to go talk with the recommendee. And get their OK. Because just



because someone is qualified doesn't mean they have the capacity in their life to take on the role.

In both of those things here's what I want you to hear: We believe the church is more than a worship event. It's a community that cares for and loves each other and helps disciple each other LIKE FAMILY. And man, I know I'm biased but I have no problem saying I believe this is a good one.

Series Recap - 2 min

OK. Family business done. Let's get into our sermon. Head to the book of Colossians. We are in chapter 3. We opened our year here in this book because it contains a simple, powerful call that I believe needs to guide us in 2024. It comes from chapter one.

17 He is before all things, and by him all things hold together.
18 He is also the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that he might come to have first place in everything. -- Colossians 1:17-18

And what we've said over and over is that there's a difference between Jesus being among all things and before all things. It's easy in the bible belt to put him among all things but not first place in everything. And the false religion of cultural Christianity says just put Jesus somewhere on your shelf. Give him a couple of hours on Sunday a few times a year and be a moral person...That's Jesus among all things. And Jesus didn't

come to be among the things of your life. HE IS before all things, and he has come to have FIRST PLACE in everything in your life. So, as we've walked through the letter, we've been walking through what that looks like. To move him to first place in everything in our lives. Easier said than done right? That's why we've built this discipleship plan for 2024. To help you take concrete steps towards putting Jesus first. You will hear us say a lot "we help people take their next steps in following Jesus." Your discipleship plan is designed with that in mind. To help you take a next step. Hope you will finish building these last couple of weeks and then just start walking it out.

Sermon Intro - 4 min

TODAY we are in chapter 3. It's awesome. And what he's doing now is he's starting to talk about what the JESUS ABOVE ALL THINGS life looks like. It's starting to get practical. Over these final 3 weeks of the series, you'll be confronted with the Christian Ethic. The call to live God's way. Not to EARN God's favor but because you ARE a Christian. Think of it this way.

Paul is going to use the language of old self & new self. And he's going to kind of talk about these selves like they are clothing. He's going to say you've PUT OFF the old self and PUT ON the new self. So, you should look different. Your internal thoughts, motivations, & desires. And your external interactions. And I finally started understanding this metaphor when 5 years ago I bought a pair of Jordans.



But here's the thing...When I bought them, I didn't really know what I was wearing. See I had started playing basketball more and I needed some real basketball shoes. So, I thought...what could be more of a basketball shoe than AIR JORDANS!? So, they come in the mail in a really nice box. And I was like...man that's over-the-top packaging for some basketball shoes. So, I took them out...and went out on the court and played in them.

A few days later I see Pastor Rashard (who is our unofficial pastor of shoes) and I'm like hey man I finally got some Jordans. "Really?" "yeah, they are super comfortable to walk around in...but they weren't that great when I played in them the other day." And Rashard gave me one of these looks that I now recognize. Puts his hand on my shoulder and says oh my goodness you did not play in fresh new J's. And then he proceeded to explain that Jordans are a fashion sneaker. I didn't have that category. **He said your problem is that you don't see the value these shoes have. If you did, you'd treat em differently.** So, he introduces me to the sneaker kingdom and honestly, it's crazy. And he says ok couple of basics for walking in Jordans: don't crease em, you don't walk through grass in em. There are sidewalks. AND you DO NOT play ball in them. You have put on Js...you gotta walk like it. They will up your fashion game more than anything else you own...if you treat 'em right.

My feet were in Jordans...but I was walking like I had on any old pair of shoes. As silly as it sounds at 35 years old, I was actually going up and down the hallway of my house learning to walk in new shoes. I had to unlearn and then learn how to walk. And the point here is: MJ, if you are watching... one tar heel to another I apologize. And if you want to send me some fresh 1s...I'll wear em right ok.

I'm kidding listen the point is that today our passage of scripture is going to celebrate our standing in Christ. That we have new life in Christ. and then he's going to tell us how to walk around in what we are already standing in. I think this is going to be great because of how honest it is about the process of walking with Jesus.

discipleship is about celebrating the new life we have. Starting from there. But then this passage is going to highlight the struggle that takes place as we try to unlearn the old way of walking and then learn how to walk in the new life. So today I'm going to kind of make two lists. Old Self & New Self. Because that's kind of what Paul does. And I want you to be able to see where you are treating new self like old self. So, if you were taking notes I want you to put room for an if/then statement. And then we'll talk about the New Self & Old Self.

So, if you have been raised with Christ, seek the 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 hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

If you have been raised with Christ. The central Christian belief is that Jesus is God, who came to earth and was born of a virgin, lived a sinless life and died as a payment for our sins. And then 3 days later he rose from the grave. Like you cannot be a Christian without believing that Jesus rose from the grave. And the gospel message says that we who believe this & receive his death & resurrection as our payment & victory...have been raised with Christ. That means we have new life.

And this is the contrast we are going to see all day long. Old Life vs New Life. Old ways of walking vs new ways of walking. He says in this new life we are to seek the things above, to set your minds on the things above. And listen to me it might be that the problem in your life as a Christian is that you've missed that word SEEK. It's very active. He doesn't say passively endorse the things above...nod your head to the things above. NO, he says SEEK. SET YOUR MIND ON. That's your if/then statement. IF you have been raised with Christ, direct your life towards kingdom things.

Is that what characterizes your life? Let me give you one example that is among the ones about to come up in our passage. This week in our discipleship plan we are going to

talk about generosity and specifically about money. The REASON we talk about it is because Jesus talked about it MORE than heaven and hell combined. He said where your treasure is...that's where your heart will be. Basically, your money is a thermometer for your heart. Want to know what you truly love...what you are seeking...what your life is directed towards... follow your money.

So, here's a question: What does your money say about what you are SEEKING? What does your money say about how you direct your life? Money is powerful because it's a-moral. It's not good or bad on its own. But the love of it...craving it...

10 For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and by craving it, some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs. -- 1 Timothy 6:8-10

So in our community groups we are going to talk about the antidote to greed which is gospel motivated generosity. As you re-direct your attention and affection onto KINGDOM things, the things above...here's what happens. Externally - the gospel is proclaimed to more people which is awesome. And INTERNALLY - you are changed. You are set free from the old self who used to grip money and what it could buy you. Because the security it can buy you - IS NOTHING compared to the security Jesus bought for you. He's secured eternal life for you! The sense of self-worth it can give you - is NOTHING



compared to the worth of being called son or daughter of GOD himself.

Some of you have never been taught a Gospel motivated way to seek the things above with your money. And I hope this year will change that for you. If you call this your church, I hope you will give here because the church is God's plan A for the kingdom to go forward here on earth. BUT, listen I always say this - if you are in a place where you are hesitant to do that...like you are skeptical of the church and a pastor talking about money puts you on edge...Don't give here. Just give SOMEWHERE to a ministry that is bringing the gospel to the world and WATCH what God does out there and in here. And I'm happy to recommend 4 or 5 ministries I know of that Courtney and I support.

Ok Gotta keep going, you'll unpack that more in your discipleship plan. Ok so we are seeking the things above. Because our life is hidden with Christ. Paul says it elsewhere

20 I have been crucified with Christ, and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. -- Galatians 2:20

And as you live, fix your eyes on eternity. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory.

Because you are hidden with him...you go where he goes. And one day he will come back here and bring a final forever victory over Satan and then he will sit down forever on the throne of glory. And we will be there with him! And, we say this a lot, but our confidence in THAT day gives me endurance & hope to get through this day. BUT, unless you are in CHRIST...none of this applies. Where people get messed up is dealing with the ethics of Christianity before the message of Christianity. Some of you today need to simply believe!

So what does the new life look like versus the old life. Well now we get into our list. And look the point of this old life v new life list is not to pat yourself on the back NOR is it to make you feel loads of guilt. It's just to help you walk. To help you flourish as a follower of Jesus.

5 Therefore, put to death what belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desire, and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, God's wrath is coming upon the disobedient, 7 and you once walked in these things when you were living in them. 8 But now, put away all the following: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and filthy language from your mouth. 9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old self with its practices



Ok First let's list out the old life. And I think what I want to say is as I go through this list. My concern is we don't take these as serious as God does. He says put this stuff TO DEATH.

- Sexual Immorality - That's any sexual expression outside of marriage between a man & woman. Some of you are like, no big deal if we sleep together man. YES IT IS. It is rebellion against God and sin that ultimately harms you, corrodes your soul, and in the end leaves you more broken in this life and even worse bound for eternal separation from God.
- Impurity - broadens the command to include putting to death any kind of moral corruption.
- Lust - Put to death the sexual immorality of your THOUGHT LIFE. I hear people say its not a sin if I don't act on it. I can't control my thoughts. Ya'll transformation does not happen until you THINK differently. Be transformed by the renewing of your MIND. Yes your lustful thoughts are OLD LIFE sins that God calls you to put to death
- Evil Desire - The impulse to do evil. Put to death the ignition switch in your heart that sees an opportunity and wants to destroy, to tear down, to take...whatever. Put THAT to death.
- Greed - The insatiable desire for more.

That's all just verse 6. Verse 8 he makes another list right? I won't hit those individually but they are important for you to consider. Because these are the ones that show up in your

interactions with others. Really there are two summarizing sins in v.5&8 - lust & anger. And when both pop up in your life they are like SMOKE from a flame. The Flame that is creating this smoke is a heart choosing SELF over Jesus. Old life over New life.

Now, I want you to see something in there. He tells you to "put to death" what you have already died to. This is him saying its going to take some intentional active work on your part to move forward in the standing you have in Christ. Positionally...you are dead to those things. You have breathed your last breath to sin's dominion. It's reign is over. And yet...every single person knows those things that we died to...keep coming up. That's because they had deep roots in us. Look at the list. This is how you walked when you were wearing the old shoes. And I realize the shoe metaphor breaks down a little because this wasn't just living "lesser". It was. Because God offers the most fulfilling human life. BUT, this was also living in direct rebellion to God. That's what sin is. Now I want to pause here and ask...if this is so clear of a command...WHY DON'T WE PUT THIS STUFF TO DEATH? Why don't we put the old self to death? Can we talk for a minute about that. Little aside where I give you a couple reasons to think about.

We don't put the old self to death because we are blind to it. Listen, becoming in practice what you ARE in position means going through a lot of self assessment. And what always



happens is there are areas in our character that either because of pride or ignorance we just are blind to how stuck in the old life they are. One of the first areas I was completely blind to when I became a Christian was my fear of people. And my fear of people caused me to just lie to others to create a perception of me that they would approve of. And it that fear motivated lying was so entrenched in my habits that I didn't even realize I was doing it. I just knew that I was still paralyzed by fear even though I was a Christian which was frustrating. But not surprising.

The way God revealed this to me was through a combination of reading God's word **and** being in a transparent community with a mentor type guy who said hard things I needed to hear. Listen you need people who will help you see where the enemy is deceiving you into walking in your old ways. But you gotta trust them. That they are not out to judge you. They simply want to help you follow Jesus with your whole life. The best thing you can do is find a believer whose life you respect...who you would want to be like...and ask: where are my blind spots.

We don't put off the old self because we are comfortable in it. See blindness is one thing. We didn't realize we were worshiping the wrong thing. But for some Christians its not blindness, its just comfort. We know what God says, but we are comfortable in our way.

This is true in the area of sexuality. God has this incredible, beautiful portrait of sex that he created for us but we are so consumed by our earthly nature that its no surprise that we prefer earthly nature. Old Self. We are like the kid whose parents are trying to take him to the beach to play in the ocean but his eyes are fixed on a puddle of raw sewage he's determined to play in. Then his parents pick him up and show him the ocean...and he says nah I like this toxic sewage.

The old self is toxic to the new self. But sometimes because its what we know, we just prefer it. And we need to see that as sin. We don't need to try to justify it. We need to repent of it. And we need to put it to death because God tells us to right here. And listen, I'm not saying that's easy. But I am saying God has something better for you. Even if it will require great discomfort. Putting something to death is UNCOMFORTABLE! Maybe you are living together and you've got kids...I've watched people come under conviction from God and say you know what...its time to walk in the new life. I want all God wants for us. So, I'm gonna trust God and walk in that standing he's given me. I've seen people get married, I've seen one move out for a short time until they get married. Again get a fellow Christian to help you think through this but you can honor God here.

Now how do we put to death the old self? **We put the old self to death by depending on God's strength instead of our own.**



It's funny we believe that our standing comes through grace alone...that Christ gave us the new life even when we didn't deserve it. And yet, we try to walk in our own strength. As if the same power that saved us LEFT us to our own strength. And when those old things creep in, man we are trying in our strength. Paul says in 2 Corinthians 12 that when he is weak...then he is strong. Why? Because God's power is made more evident in his weakness. So if right now you are in this good fight of trying to put off those old ways of the old life and you find yourself failing...know that there is victory for you. And you don't have to get stronger. You actually have to get weaker. You have to lay down your pride. Get on your knees and be really needy before God. And in your weakness his spirit will carry you. Americans have a hard time being needy.

But because you are in Christ you are now in the realm of the Holy Spirit's power. You have new shoes. See the call to put to death is actually a call to embrace and cooperate with the power that is already within you. Allow the Spirit to work in your life. That's what Paul starts to get at in verses 10 & 11.

10 and have put on the new self. You are being renewed in knowledge according to the image of your Creator.

Hey I just want you to see right there that God is working something in you. God is renewing you and making you more into the image of Christ. God doesn't just HOPE YOU GET

THERE. He puts his spirit within you. That conviction you are starting to feel, man that is God renewing you. Lean into that. The God who saved you didn't leave you. He's with you. Renewing you. When you say ok God I want to put off the old self...God is the one stirring that desire and God is the one who is going to help you walk in the new life.

YOU ARE NOT YOUR SIN. YOU ARE NOT WHO YOU WERE! And God himself promises he is not done with you. I know many of you feel like you are grinding it out in life right now. Feels like nothing really seems different from yesterday or the week before or the year before but I'm telling you. If you will walk with him. Depend on him. Stay dependent on him. I'm telling you

He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Jesus Christ. Philippians 1.6

So don't give up! YOU ARE BEING RENEWED. God IS WORKING right now. Man this is why you need to be around some older Christians. And why you older Christians need to get in community with younger Christians. You gotta tell them this. They need to be encouraged. Because you've got enough years following Jesus to say "OH man I need Jesus today because I'm still not who I want to be...BUT THANKS BE TO GOD I CAN LOOK BACK AND SAY I'M NOT WHO I WAS EITHER!" God has been renewing me and I am a different person than the man or woman of my 20s.



A couple of different times my kids have been given for Christmas a Rock Tumbler. We love going up to mountains and especially when you have little kids one of the touristy things to do is go gem mining. Which is really a wallet mining scam but whatever its fun. Anyways at the end you take your findings in and they show you what rocks you have and they show you a polished, version of it. You are holding this rough thing & they've got this smooth shiny version.

So we thought it'd be cool to get our kids a Rock Tumbler so they could take their rocks and see them transform into the smooth shiny version. We get it out Christmas day & get their rocks and follow the instructions. Put your rocks in. Put this grade 1 packet of sand in which serve to smooth the rocks as the tumble. Ok now they are all in the barrel. Now turn it on. Cool you can hear it tumbling the rocks pretty cool. Next instruction says
Now let rocks tumble for ONE WEEK. Then repeat step 2 with grade 2 sand. ONE MORE WEEK. There are 4 grades of sand. And then a polishing sand. It's going to be 5 weeks!?!?!?! You want an 8 yr old to wait TIL FEBRUARY!?!?! But we did and in the end it was pretty cool.

Listen we want God to microwave our renewal. And its just not how he works. And that's for our good. He renews us day after day. And you might just be in day 17 and feeling like...I'm just tumbling around. And I promise God is renewing you.

And not just you, he's renewing all of us. When we each depend on the Lord and do so together as the body of Christ...the church starts to look different from the world. Look at what he says

11 In Christ there is not Greek and Jew, circumcision and uncircumcision, barbarian, Scythian, slave and free; but Christ is all and in all. -- Colossians 3:11

See this list are things that defined their place in the world. And he specifically pairs them up to show battle lines of sorts. These are how you used to define your place in the world and how the world often does that is by giving you an enemy so you can say I'm NOT THEM. I'm in this group NOT that. THEY ARE WRONG I AM RIGHT.
And Paul is saying look what makes the church so powerful is that God breaks down that dividing wall of hostility. It's not that all your cultural distinctives go away. Like a Greek was still a Greek BUT...in the CHURCH...that identity is subordinated to JESUS. You are NOT a WHITE Christian or a Black Christian or a LATINO Christian. You are a CHRISTIAN. JESUS Comes First. And that's true for the church as well. Listen...let's get real. Sometimes in the south we still talk about churches as White Church and Black Church. That's the result of generational division in the south. I know, Mercy gets labeled as a white church. Some of you get grief because you are not white, and your friends are wondering why you attend that white church.



That's the world saying your first identity is Race. And you should line up by race. But listen white people - it's got truth to it when one culture dictates HOW we worship. Bunch of Songs that feel like we are slow dancing with Jesus and church looks like its sponsored by old navy & target. I get it man. So, TO ALL OF US God says ethnic identity and cultural identity MUST BE SECONDARY to JESUS Identity. That's the poor church or the rich church. NO NO...this is the JESUS Church. We are out here trying to be a Jesus Church and the NEW SELF CHURCH - the HIDDEN IN JESUS CHURCH - will look radically different than the world around it. WE WILL PUT TO DEATH anger & malice and greed and whatever else. And we will put on CHRIST.

I'll be honest ya'll that's just not easy. We need the strength of Christ to WALK IN the unity he has already achieved for us. Not to forget our culture but to submit it under the Lordship of Jesus. And then when we bring our cultures together UNDER THE LORDSHIP OF JESUS...we become something the world doesn't understand yet wants desperately to be a part of. The world is trying so hard right now to FORCE diversity, equity, and inclusion. And what it can't understand is that until you have a UNIFYING MORE POWERFUL IDENTITY -

CHRIST IS ALL IN ALL - you will never achieve it. You will just pretend for a little while.

May we be the people of God who LIVE like Christ is all in all. Who really are a new race according to 1 Peter 2.10. The chosen race the royal priesthood. Whose dinner tables & bible studies & church services have only one explanation - CHRIST IS ALL IN ALL!!

Listen next week Paul is going to tell us what it looks like to PUT ON JESUS in all of our relationships. But you can't put on new shoes until you take off the old ones. You can't walk in the new life until you die to the old one.

GOSPEL CLOSE

Die to the old life. How to start? Confession & Repentance

Admitting to God I'm walking in the old life. I'm turning from that.

Yielding to the power of God. - When I am weak, then I am strong.