Colossians 3:1 – 4:6

The past three weeks we have been looking at the letter that Paul wrote to the small church in Colosse. A small minority group, grasping their faith and hope in Christ in difficult circumstances. We are not surrounded by shrines and temples to other gods or religions, but there are plenty of New Age spiritual beliefs that are all around us. Spiritualists and crystals for example.

We looked at Paul urging them to keep focus on the one true hope, which is our resurrection life with Christ. All other hopes could lead us to feelings of defeat or crushing dreams (like a rugby ball wrestled from our hands) – but our hope in Jesus’ promises are what keeps us hopeful and gives us that inner peace – shalom – an inner harmony of complete wellbeing, despite circumstances.

It is that true hope that will allow us to be fruitful.

Today we continue with the exploration of the letter, using The Message version, just to keep us from over-familiarity perhaps.

Chapter 3 begins with stating again that Jesus should be our focus. The hope of our resurrected life with Him. I am currently reading various books, preparing to write an essay on what exactly our resurrected life is, and what it is not – but for now, we trust that however it comes about we will have an eternity in the presence of Jesus and His glory will reign in fullness.

And we looked last week that our eternity begins not after we have died, but at the time that we accept Jesus as our Lord and Saviour. We are living in His presence right now, with the Holy Spirit dwelling within us.

Paul urges that we need to be living in accordance with that fact right now, in every action that we take. Don’t shuffle along in The Message with eyes to the ground. Basically, do not get disheartened when rugby tackled by situations in life, but know that Jesus is working out His purpose and plan and can use all things for His good purposes.

See things from His perspective. In The Message it goes on to use the phrase that “God is about to explode in anger”. But I have interpreted that God does not see all and become angrier and angrier, looking for vengeance and revenge – rather he sees all in love and His heart grieves for His precious people when He sees them turning from Him into danger and harmful ways.

See things from His perspective. This is what keeps us from becoming insensitive to what happens to this world. Jesus cares for people, He is interested in each person individually.

Last week I re-iterated that every single one of us has value and worth to Jesus, for the value of His kingdom. The character of Jesus goes beyond that – everyone has value and worth in His eyes.

Look at His life when He was fully human in this world. He had compassion for everyone. He wrote no-one off. He spoke to sinners of every kind. He gave them acceptance when they chose to follow Him, He reached out with healing, he shared meals, every day conversation and laughter with people, he celebrated at weddings, he cried at the death of His friend.

This is now our real life, we do all the ordinary things that we have always done, but our heartbeat is now our hope in Jesus. We will see everything through His lens, through the imparting of wisdom and insight from the Holy Spirit within us. We will still have emotions, but they will not be what shapes our life, outlook and attitude.

When we walk alongside others, we will rejoice with them, we will mourn with them, but we will not be defeated to see a perspective of life with no meaning or hope – we must see things from the perspective of Jesus. That does not mean that we have every answer, but it will mean that we place our trust that He can use ALL things for good.

We offer hope and not despair. That line, our real life is invisible to spectators, or hidden with Christ in God in the NIV, means that people will not automatically know what our hope is. But the way that we treat people will be different. If we see all people as Jesus sees them, as His created loved ones, then that will help us to treat people well, as well as ourselves.

The Spiritual fruit will come to the fore – patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, peace, joy, self-control, love. It takes work to walk in that way, we need to choose to dress ourselves into that wardrobe that has been given to us. We need to choose to continually seek guidance from the Holy Spirit. But He is faithful and always present with us.

When Paul writes that all the old fashions and labels have gone, insider and outsider, slave and free, it means that we simply see others around us as people who are valued by Jesus.

We will often come across others who do not act in the same way. But we must never forget that we also had a life before accepting Christ. We need to walk beside those who allow us to, to forgive them as Jesus has forgiven each of us, to bring all our hurt and rejection to Jesus, at the foot of the cross, and seek His strength to carry on.

Paul lists some practical ways of showing the way of Jesus in their own homes and surroundings. He is acknowledging that to follow Jesus does not mean that everyone will travel around like Paul did. But he does go on to ask them to pray for opportunities for them.

We can show a difference in how we treat those who are close to us. It does not say that we have to preach the new religion at every opportunity – but whatever people accept of Jesus, or do not accept, should not discourage us to live in accordance with His moral code.

For us in 2023, whether in Great Missenden or any place, I would like to encourage you again, just as Paul was encouraging the Colossian church. As you live and partake in community, do not miss a trick. Keep alert for opportunities of sharing the love of Jesus with those you are with.

That does not mean that we preach or spout scripture willy-nilly if that is not appropriate – or to be their redeemer. We are not even called to actively befriend or seek people out – but to be open to follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

We can treat each person we are brought into meeting with respect, to see each person as a child of God, a precious jewel in His eyes, and help to bring them to their best. Not to put them down, to behave judgementally with the circumstances or choices that they have made, but to love them and be compassionate to them – see their life from the perspective of Jesus.

Perhaps one day they will also know the same hope in Him as we have graciously received.

Be encouraged my dear brothers and sisters to focus on our promise of hope of eternal presence with Jesus, allow that to shape our lives so that our Spiritual fruit will be abundant for when the metaphorical bees that Jesus has planned to bring to our tree may be filled to complete fullness with the sweet nectar of the one true hope in Jesus.