

## ALL OF THE CREDIT

Colossians 3:1-4, 12-17

January 20 and 27, 2019

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Grace to you and peace from him who is and who was and who is to come, the almighty. Good Morning Church!

Let us pray:

Almighty and gracious God, it is with joy and anticipation that we come to worship you this morning, but there are so many things running through our minds that sometimes it's hard to focus. And so, for just a moment, we settle into your Spirit that all outside distractions might wash away and we might be fully centered on you and on your will. Speak to us once more, your words of truth and allow our lives to be changed. We want to put you at the center - help us to do that. In Jesus name, amen.

If you are just joining us after a few weeks, we are continuing in our series together entitled, Centered. We are looking together at what it looks like to live a christ centered life. At the core of every life is a focus or central motivation - a motivating factor. There are many motivating factors in our life, but if we are really to get a centered life - a life centered on Christ, Jesus is our central motivation.

Pastor David also shared a message about the motivating factors that move us closer to a Christ centered life. An intimate and personal relationship with Christ causes our lives to move closer and closer to the center. In order to do that we must have an awareness of him, move into relationship with him and call upon him in prayer.

A Christ Centered life begins with an awareness of the source of everything that we are. Jesus becomes that source for us. If you were with us when Pastor Dennis shared his message, you will remember him saying that **Jesus is the source of all things**. We confirm and affirm that faith quite often when we declare that Jesus is the source of all goodness, beauty, truth and love.

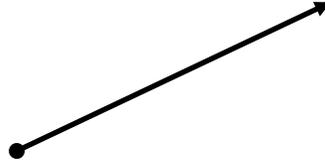
In order for us to have a meaningful, fulfilling and purposeful life - we turn to that source and remember that every blessing that we receive comes from the Lord. In Christ, we have everything that we need for a godly life.

And last week, we heard a message on Hope. Pastor David reviewed with us the text of Isaiah 40 that talks about the Hope that we have in Jesus. Hope, or that hopeful expectation or anticipation that we have provides for us a level of trust in our lives. Those who have hope in the Lord have renewed strength even during times of trouble. They are able to walk and not grow weary and walk and not faint.

Today, we turn our attention to a Christ Centered life as our ultimate goal.

I have to admit to you that throughout this entire time that we've been talking about living a Christ centered life, a few images have come to mind.

A. The first image is this line. It comes to me from math class I guess. There is a starting point - a center if you will and the line moves out from that starting point.



For me - that image reminds me that Christ at the center of our lives is the place from which we move out, out into the world into the life that we live. But there are limitations to that image I suspect, because its as if you leave Christ where you began rather than taking him with you along the journey.

B. Realizing that any image that I come up with has its limitations, I also can't help with thinking about typing styles on our computers or even on our old type-writers. Alignment is that technical term of understanding where your typing begins. To be aligned from the left, means that your typing begins from the left and moves out to the center



C. To be aligned from the right will cause your typing to start from the right edge of your document and move toward the center.



D. Finally - to be aligned from the center has everything moving from a central point out to the edges of your page.



Back when I took typing in the dark ages, it wasn't referred to as alignment, but rather justification. How you justified your page determined how you were typing in your document. Some of you remember what it was like to center a title on a document. You had to count the number of characters including your spaces, count back from the center before you began typing. Sometimes, even when you were right - you had to begin your document all over again.

That's actually a great way to understand the term justification when it comes to being in right relationship with God.

(Slide) Romans 8:31-34 says, "What, then, shall we say in response to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also, along with him, graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who then is the one who condemns? No one. Christ Jesus who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us."

Hear that again. It is God who justifies. We live in a right relationship with God when we are justified. When we are living with Christ at the center, our lives are justified from that point and in right relationship with God.

And if you persevere with me for just one more moment, I think there is one more image that helps me think about having Christ at the center.



This target - or bullseye is an image that has me focus all of my attention and energy to the center point. It is where I want to direct my focus - it is my goal - to hit the center point. When everything is moving in the right direction, when your shoulders and your hands, your hand eye coordination is at its best, you throw your dart and it hits the bullseye!

Maybe that's the image that we want to focus on today. Everything that Christ is as our motivation and our source in our lives - our ultimate goal, our target is a Christ-centered life that is all about Jesus. Jesus gets all the glory. When we have a Christ-centered life, we no longer live for ourselves, but we live for Him.

Paul reminds us in many of his writings, but especially in this letter of Colossians today that Christ is at the center of God's purpose. It goes all the way back to what Pastor Dennis was talking about when he talked about Jesus giving us direction. In Christ, our lives that are often a pot-luck dinner of stress, distraction, sickness and sin - are made perfect in his likeness. It is when we are in union with Christ that we find growth, maturity, and fullness. You can say that **with Christ at the center, all things fall into order.**

Our identity is dependent upon our relationship with Christ. Who we are, what we will become is wholly dependent upon the relationship that we have with Christ. And here is the good news, what we once were no longer matters. We are made new in Christ through our relationship with him. When we have Jesus at the center, it's like we get a do-over.

Baptism for me is a powerful image. In our baptism, we die to our old selves and we raise with Christ to a new life. We die to old and we are alive with Christ. And that's exactly what the writer of our lesson was referring to today. "For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God."

One of my favorite movies is Shawshank Redemption. It's one of those movies that I can watch over and over again. It is a movie that I can turn to when it's on AMC and pick up where ever the movie is.

But what I love about Shawshank is this beautiful image of Andy Dufresne after he escapes from prison. For me, it is a message of escaping an old life and what it takes to get away from that life. Sometimes, we crawl through 500 yards of filth and stench so foul that it burns our lungs, and it takes falling into the arms of grace and the waters of baptism to make us clean.

When Andy emerges from that sewer, he falls into the water, strips off his old clothes and puts on his new clothes. That's exactly what the writer was talking about when he reminded us to put away our old selves and clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, and humility. Because we die to our old selves - we are alive.

But before I get too far down that path - let me return again to this image of Christ at the center. When we put Christ at the center and when we put Christ first, it's no longer about us, but it is about Christ in us. Christ gets all the credit and Christ is our focus.

When we live as Christ's chosen people we live into that new creation. But it does not absolve us of our responsibility. We have to put something into this. To live with Christ at the center means that we put Christ first. And putting Christ first means that we must learn, worship and obey.

So what does that look like?

**Putting Christ first means that we surrender.** To surrender means to say that we cannot do this on our own, that we don't have it all figured out. What the world offers to us and what the world says is best will not offer us what we need and so we need to go to the Word of God and to scripture to learn what it is that God is calling us to do and how to live and love.

Surrender means learning in community and being a part of a small group that seeks to also shape their lives through the Word of God. It is surrounding our lives and our families with a community of those who are also guided by that same word. Scripture is our starting point and it is a way of saying that Christ is central to who we are and what we believe.

When we surrender our lives to Christ - we begin to read more and more scripture.

**Putting Christ first also means that we worship.** Our only response to everything that we have been given is to worship God, to give thanks, to offer our very best of ourselves in worship. When things are going well, we have a tendency in our lives to think that what we have is all because of us. But that's in conflict with living with Christ at the center. When we have Christ at the Center - Christ becomes the object of our affection and our attention. This is where Jesus gets the credit, this is where the rubber starts to hit the road.

1 Chronicles 16 says, "Sing to the Lord, all the earth; proclaim his salvation day after day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous deeds among the peoples."

Moreover, scripture is full of worship and the Psalms will often remind us of that voice of praise and thanksgiving. "Ascribe to the Lord, you heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength."

When we center ourselves in worship - we begin to make worship a priority in our lives.

And finally, **Putting Christ first means that we obey.**

One of my favorite scripture verses says, "Be doers of the word and not merely hearers." The NIV says, "Do not merely listen to the Word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."

Living a Christ centered life is built upon the surrender and the worship when we actually do the things that God commands in scripture. It's at this point that our life is guided by compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. We obey Christ and allow Christ to guide our lives when we bear with one another and forgive and when we are bound in perfect unity with Christ.

The scripture says - whatever you do - do it in the name of the Lord Jesus.

As you heard earlier, I am often hearing and applying things that I've read or seen through the lens of Christ. Whether it's watching a movie or reading an article in a running magazine, I will often hear something said from a secular perspective that I think makes an application for us today.

This week I was listening to a podcast and the hosts of the podcast were talking setting goals and having them stick. As you can imagine, this podcast was good timing considering many

people are setting new goals in the New Year, but it was particularly interesting to me as I think about setting another goal of running in the Pittsburgh Half Marathon in May.

The guest was talking about why we often fail and how to get over those hurdles in our lives by talking about removing the “All or nothing attitude.” We often fail because we have this all or nothing attitude that is often the barrier to accomplishing our goals. For example, removing all sugar from our diet only sets us up for failure. And when we have just a little sugar or fall off the wagon, we feel as if we’ve failed.

She then offered an alternative. Instead of an all or nothing attitude, she wanted you to think of an “Always something.” Not all or nothing, but “always something.”

In our walk with Christ - we may think that in order to live a Christ centered life, It has to be all or nothing. And then sometimes we fail, get discouraged and we fall away. You may hear all of these messages that we’ve been preaching and think to yourself - “there’s no way I can be that kind of Christian, I guess this isn’t for me.”

But what if you thought about it from moving further and further along, getting stronger and stronger, always having the mind of Christ, always something?

Always something means, reading just a little more. Getting more involved in your small group, worshipping more this month than you did last month. When we have that reminder that we should have always something about Christ in our lives - our lives slowly change into the likeness of the one who created us.

Remember - this is all about Christ. He’s going to get all the credit. When we do, all other things will fall into place.

With Christ at the center, we offer this to Him! Let us pray!