

Contemplating God

“The highest, most truthful kind of human life is one spent contemplating God”. This is how I concluded my sermon last Sunday, and I would like to continue that thought process with you this morning by exploring in a little more detail what it means to contemplate God; or to use the language of our reading from Colossians this morning, how we are to: “set our minds on things above and not on things on the earth”. I think all of us would agree that our lives would be better if we spent less time worrying about things we can’t change. Too often, our thoughts are consumed with matters, which are beyond our control. And yet, this does not stop us from worrying, stressing and fretting. Logically, we know we need to set aside these frivolous thoughts, but unfortunately, we cannot because life is not lived according to logic; it’s not reason but desire that drives our decision making. The heart wants what the heart wants; and “the heart has reasons that reason cannot know” (Blaise Pascal). Because of this, we end up being slaves to our thoughts. And this fits the biblical description of sin. Sin includes physical acts of disobedience, yes, but sin is so much more than that. Sin corrupts our internal drives and desires; we not only do what we don’t want to do, but we think and desire those things which are not good for us. I don’t know about you, but I am tired of my usual train of thought for the tracks upon which my mental train is set often lead to destinations I am tired of frequenting. Played out locations I have visited too many times. So, when I say the highest, most truthful kind of human life is one spent contemplating God, I say these words to myself as much as I say them to you.

Being a Christian means not only acting differently, but thinking differently about ourselves and the world around us. For our thoughts become words, our words become actions, our actions become habits, and our habits become our habitations. We inhabit our habits; we quite literally take up residence in them—they define us, they make us who we are. Show me what someone is in the habit of doing every day, and I will show you what he/she values most in this life. Our lives are structured around our daily

habits; they set the rhythm for our existence. This is why St. Paul encourages us this morning to set our minds to a different rhythm. Easier said than done, I admit, but the things that are truly worth having in this life are usually difficult to achieve; they require effort and devotion and sacrifice. So, when St. Paul says “set your minds on things above” this is meant to be a labor of love as we seek to contemplate God.

But how do we start? That’s the question, is it not? How do we even begin to contemplate God? For starters, to set our minds on things above does not mean forgetting about the things below. This would be a wrong conclusion as if contemplating God required us to escape to some secluded location and sit in a lotus position thinking about God’s essence and existence. Better if we think about the contemplation of God as that which makes us better equipped to handle the ordinary affairs of life. Better still, contemplation of God takes us out of this world only to return us to it with a newfound commitment to seeing God in all things and all things in God. Christ’s very desire is that we would not be taken from the world, but that we would be preserved from the evil one, and that the world might be transformed through us (John 17:15). Contemplating God, then, is not a physical removal, but a spiritual disposition. By contemplating God, we are disposed towards God. Our souls are inclined towards Him to receive His wisdom and direction. We are wide-open to His holy will, sensitive to His movements, attuned to His presence, attentive to His Word. Prayer, meditation, contemplation—these are not three separate concepts, but are of one seamless piece. They form our nature so that they become second nature to us. As breathing is to the body, we pray without ceasing, we contemplate without thinking for God is the source and substance of every thought, and the destination to which every action is aimed. Setting our minds on things above does not mean we consciously think about God every moment; it means that we pass every thought through Him. God becomes the interpretive lens by which we view the world. Whether at work or at play or at rest we are in constant dialogue with God. By viewing our lives as a continuous dialogue with God, we retrain our hearts and minds to see God’s eternity in every temporal event. Since nothing can be or be

conceived without God then all things in the natural world involve and express God. The more we know God as the Cause of all things the more we can enjoy the very things He causes. Our supreme good not only depends on this knowledge of God but consists entirely in it.

There is great benefit to a life spent in contemplation of God. The moment we stop thinking about God as a piece of knowledge to be acquired by our minds, and instead understand God as the very One who occupies our minds then we find rest in God's eternal repose. We can finally be still and know God as the One from whom all life flows. Such Divine rest changes the way our consciousness spends its time. Everything around us takes on a heavenly meaning. Even the most mundane of tasks has a Divine dimension to it. In this way, the things of this world are not neglected, but elevated to find their ultimate fulfillment in God. For from God all things flow and to God all things shall return....and that is certainly worth thinking about. Amen.

In Christ,

Pastor Jeremy H Mills