

Every Wednesday night during the 70's and 80's TV presenter Eamonn Andrews would suddenly appear out of nowhere to catch an unsuspecting celebrity off guard, as he brandished a big red book saying tonight This is Your Life.

The shocked celebrity would then be whisked off to a studio somewhere to have a nostalgic look back over their life and achievements.

Then as the show went on there'd always be a couple of surprise guests from the celebrities past like an old teacher or school friend who'd moved to Australia; and the celebrity would have to guess from the person's voice who it was before they came out from behind a red curtain.

Well I wonder if Eamon Andrews could walk through the door this morning what the big red book of your life would say about you.

What would be the central focus of your life and defining moments, as you look back over the years?

In that reading from Colossians earlier, if the Apostle Paul was presenting a similar program, it wouldn't be called This is your Life; it'd be called That was your Life.

And so writing to a young Church that's in danger of being led astray by false teaching that included the veneration of angels, ascetic practices, like denying certain foods, and the observance of certain feast days, Paul wants to encourage the Colossians to stay faithful to Jesus, by reminding them of who they were in the past, compared to who they are now in Christ.

So, in chapter one Paul opens the big red book and says:

“And you, who were once alienated from God and hostile in mind doing evil deeds, he has now reconciled by Christ's physical body through death, to present you holy and blameless in his sight.”

In other words, these Colossians who were once enemies of God; are now his friends

As a result, Paul says in chapter 3

“For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God, who is your life.”

You see after putting their trust in Jesus everything's changed for these Christians; their old life's gone; and has been replaced with a brand new one that's being transformed into the likeness of Christ.

Paul says for you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God, who is your life.

Or to put it another way, the life of a Christian is so completely united to Jesus, that God sees us as having died with him on the cross.

And that's incredible isn't it, because it means that we're now dead to the old life of sin and are holy in God's sight.

But it doesn't stop there, you see having died with Christ, we've also been raised to a new life with him, because Jesus didn't stay dead did he.

So, in verse 1 Paul says: "Since then you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."

You see the life of a Christian is so bound up with Jesus that Paul can say that *his* life is ours.

And so, do you see what an amazing thing it is to be a Christian?

In Christ we've died to sin, been raised to new life, and are right now seated in heaven spiritually with Jesus, at God's right hand, the place of highest honour, security and safety; that's your status and privilege as a Christian.

So, listen to this:

We now have a new relationship with God based on our relationship with Jesus. Did Christ die? So, did we through faith in him.

Was He buried? So were we, together with Him. That means all our past with its sins and guilt are gone.

Was He raised from the dead? So are we.

Has He ascended into heaven? So, have we.

And in the end, when Christ, who is our very life appears, we shall appear with him in glory.

No wonder the New Testament writers speak so often of Christians being "In Christ," and Christ being "In Us".

But there's a paradox, isn't there.

You see although it's true to say that spiritually we're seated in Christ with God right now, and are citizens of Heaven, we still live with the grind of everyday life here on earth don't we.

So for example, I don't know if you've written a will yet; if you have, you'll know that the recipient of your estate won't take full ownership of any money or property you leave until sometime in the future, even though in one sense, it's theirs now.

In a similar way our full inheritance of a perfect life in heaven won't be until sometime in the future, even though it's guaranteed.

As a result, Paul says in verse 1:

“Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above.”

You see we're to live in the light of our future inheritance now, and who we are in Christ.

You know I've often heard a phrase, aimed at Christians that says they're too heavenly minded to be of any earthly good.

Which basically means they just walk round with our head in the clouds, and don't live in the real world!

But Paul specifically tells us to set our minds on things above, because that's where we truly belong.

But again, we see a tension don't we, because we still live with all the worlds temptations and have to constantly do battle with our own sinful natures.

So, give you an illustration, in 2016, the Iraqi army along with their allies fought a major offensive against Islamic State, in the city of Fallujah.

And although government forces managed to win the battle and recaptured the city, there were still pockets of resistance from Islamic State fighters.

Well Paul says that although Christ has defeated sin, it's still a very stubborn enemy that continues to resist.

As a result, Paul says in verse 5: “Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature.”

Or as John Owen a Puritan writer once said:

“Be killing sin or sin will be killing you.”

Paul then lists a whole host of things we need to fight against as citizens of heaven.

He says:

Put to death what is earthly in you, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires, and greed, which is idolatry.

You see when we indulge in these things, we're not being true to who we are in Christ, and so Paul says put to death what is earthly in you.

Now I might be here this morning and I don't have a problem with lust or sexual immortality; but you know Paul hasn't let me off the hook yet.

Verse 8 continues: "But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips, and do not lie to each other."

You see we all struggle with these things don't we.

So, for example I might drive to Lidl minding my own business when someone cuts me up on Long Acre; as a result, I get angry and before I know it, I'm in a road rage situation.

Or maybe I like to gossip, exaggerate, or tell the odd lie when it suits. I might even use the occasional swear word in an unguarded moment or tell a smutty joke.

But in chapter 4 Paul says: Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt.

Or as one translation puts it:

The goal is to bring out the best in others, not put them down.

And so, Paul says put to death what is earthly in you.

You see sin belongs to our old life, the one where Eamon Andrews suddenly appears with his big red book and says in that strong Irish accent:

"Jon Wright you thought you'd come here to lead a church service, but tonight: This is your life."

Except it's not. That was my life.

You see in Christ I'm a new person; and to put it simply Paul says: Be who you are now, not who you were then.

And in verse 10 he says:

Put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator.

Which he then fleshes verse 12:

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, bearing with one another, and if one has a complaint against another, forgiving each other; as the Lord has forgiven you, so you also must forgive. And above all these put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

And so, like putting on a change of clothes Paul says put on the character traits of this new self that is yours in Christ and reflects his life.

Or as one commentator puts it:

Paul wants us to live consistently with the realities that are already true about us, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved.

And the best way to do that is to set our minds on things above, as we focus on our future inheritance, and remind ourselves that even now, we're citizens of heaven, seated at the right hand of God, and hidden in Christ, who is our life.

And you know that union with Christ also means that Christians are united to each other as well, no matter what race, culture, or background they're from.

That's why we're told to love and forgive each other.

Verse 11 says:

Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free; but Christ is all, and in all.

Well this month's black history month, and a couple of weeks ago we were watching CBeebies with our 7-year-old granddaughter.

Anyway, the presenter talked about their black heroes.

As a result, a conversation ensued and we asked our granddaughter if there were any black children in her class at school, to which she replied what's a black person.

You see she had no concept of colour; to her we're all the same.

And that's what it should be like in church because Christians all one in Christ, united to him and each other.

And so, Paul says remember who you were:

“People alienated from God and enemies because of evil behaviour.”

And then remember who you are now:

“People Reconciled to God in Christ, who presents you holy in God's sight.”

And so, I close with this:

Christians are people united to Christ who should reflect deeply on that fact, and actively choose to rid themselves of what is inconsistent with their new life, putting on

what radiates the reality of Christ; choosing to cultivate a spiritual life not only for themselves as individuals but also for the whole community.

Paul says: If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things that are above not on things that are on the Earth, for you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. And that is your life. Amen