Overcoming Earthly Mindedness

Philippians 3:17-21

April 3, 2016

Star with a video looking at the sky at night

Isaiah 40:26, Lift up your eyes on high And see who has created these stars, The One who leads forth their host by number, He calls them all by name; Because of the greatness of His might and the strength of His power, Not one of them is missing.

JBYOTK, On a good night, you can see about this far 19,000,000,000,000,000. That’s 19 quadrillion miles deep within space and of course within that space there are lots and lots of starts.

There are approximately 200-400 billion stars in our Milky Way Galaxy alone. Scientist guestimate that each galaxy contains hundreds of billions of stars and there could over 100 billion galaxies in the universe.

So the total number of stars that could exist is mind boggling, estimated to be at least 70 sextillion but could possibly as high as 300 sextillion, that's a 3 with 23 0’s after it (300,000,000,000,000,000,000,000!!!!!).

Now of course we can only see a fraction of those stars on a given night. They’re simply are not enough close enough and bright enough. On a really exceptional night, with no Moon and far from any source of lights, a person with very good eyesight may be able to see 2000-2500 stars at any one time; although I feel like there were nights at Susque where you could see far more than that.

Did you know that almost every star you see in the night sky is bigger and brighter than our sun—which is the nearest star to Earth. Our sun is classified as a G2 yellow dwarf star.

But that name dwarf is a sort of misleading. About one million Earths could fit inside the Sun. It’s surface area is 11,990 times that of the Earth’s.

So why is it then that our sun looks so big and bright compared to the stars we see in the sky at night? If our sun is a just a dwarf and there are giants and supergiant stars that a 1000’s of times bigger and brighter than our sun then why, when we gaze up at night sky, do those other stars seem so small and faint?

Answer: Distance. Our sun is by far the closest to us at 93 million miles.

After that, the nearest star to Earth is Proxima Centauri. It is about 24.8 trillion miles away or 4.2 light years. That means it takes light from this star 4.2 years to reach the Earth. Using the newest, fastest propulsion systems it would still take a space ship about 75,000 years to get there. And that’s our closest star.

Is it any wonder than, that the stars we see look at, appear so small?

The earth seems like a vast body to us with our towering mountains and expansive oceans, but the stars seem so little, even though they are far bigger than the earth.

Were we to travel into space and fly out to Jupiter (which would only take you six years) then I am certain that the earth would at that point appear to be a dot, a minuscule sphere in vast heavens.

Allow me to suggest to you this morning that for most of us the things of the earth appear vast because that is where we are. It is our perspective. The things of heaven are very small in our eyes because they are distant. We can’t see them as we can the things of the earth.

We can touch the earth. We can smell it, taste it, feel it. But the heavenly things, the spiritual things, they appear far off, sometimes even indiscernible because of their distance from us.

That means that when we look at our problems, and there are many, they seem daunting and overwhelming. When we look at our health problems and they are serious and there are many in our family who are going through some difficult times, those who are battling with cancer and unknown illnesses. Those are huge and can be scary.

And that is because it is like looking at the sun compared to the stars in the heavens above. They are close to us. They affect us. The impact our daily lives. We are in the midst of them and so the things of heaven can appear very distant.

This morning I want to briefly look at how God can help us to see our problems from His perspective in an attempt to make them smaller; not in trying to dismiss them, but rather to understand them.

Turn in your Bibles to Philippians 3 as we look at some reasons why we tend to be earthly-minded and then I want to offer some suggestions that we can perhaps use to help us become more heavenly-minded and to see things in from heaven’s perspective.

In a few weeks, after our Mission conference on the 17th we will begin our study on Revelation chapters 2-3 which looks at Christ’s letters to the seven churches and we will learn from those letters some very important lessons that can help us in our mission and quest to be the church that God longs for us to be.

Next Sunday will be a special service. In the afternoon we will have a ministry dedication downtown where we will pray over those who are serving in the various downtown ministries. We are going to gather and pray for our communities and pray against those forces which would stand against God’s kingdom coming. In preparation for that, our district superintendent will be here in the morning.

I say that with fear and trepidation because I don’t want you to skip next Sunday but on the contrary I want us to fill this room with the joy of God, with the excitement that He has given us as we push back the darkness and build God’s kingdom here.

I want to show our district that just because we are the northern tier of PA, that just because we are a rural town, just because we are a small church, that doesn’t mean that God is not here and that God’s people don’t matter.

Let’s show them that even though we are small, our God is big and that the people here matter to God, that God loves these people and that Community Alliance is well and can march against the gates of hell in the power and the grace of our great God and that nothing will stand against us. Christ will shine His light here. Our God is great!

And so this morning is one of those rare moments where I find myself attempting to present a standalone message that is deep enough to challenge us in our relationship with God but without the advantage of continuing it next week.

Look at Philippians 3:17.

Paul begins this section of his letter having just completed a challenge to the believers of Philippi to press on toward the goal of the Christian life.

The goal is summarized in verse 10.

My goal, he says, is to know Christ and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

That verse alone is at least a week’s worth of study, but that isn’t even our focus.

But Paul uses that goal to urge the church to follow Him as he presses on toward that goal. He writes in verse 17, Join in imitating me and observe those who live according to the example you have in us.

As we all know there are good examples to follow and bad examples to follow. And he sets up that contrast here by encouraging them follow all who seek to know Christ because there are those who are enemies of the cross, those who oppose Christ and His Word.

Verse 18, For I have often told you, and now say again with tears, that many live as enemies of the cross of Christ. **19**Their end is destruction; their god is their stomach; their glory is in their shame. They are focused on earthly things, **20**but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

Here you see the contrast that I spook of, our enemies are focused on earthly things but our citizenship, our focus, our goal is in heaven.

We find that the greatest treasures are those that we don’t yet have. That which excites us, that which motivates, that which helps in our daily lives are ultimately not found here on earth. We eagerly await our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who is coming back from Heaven where He is now seated at the right hand of God.

We look to Him as our treasure. We look to Him as our help and hope; our refuge and strength, our savior and redeemer.

The brief description that Paul offers here of those who oppose the cross is very telling. First he says that their god is their stomach. Although Scripture teaches that man does not live by bread alone but from every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, our enemies find that what satisfies them is not the Word but the world.

Their god is their bellies, symbolizing their earthly appetite, not just for food or wine, but anything is what they crave. They lack self-control; are gluttons, worshiping all that brings pleasure to their bodies.

Next Paul says that their shame is their glory meaning that what should bring them shame and regret, they actually glory in it. They boast about their sin. They do it in the open for all to see without any guilt. They love the darkness rather than the light; they delight in sin.

And third Paul says they are focused on earthly things. Christ came to the cross to crucify the world to us and us to the world; and those who mind earthly things act directly contrary to the cross of Christ.

We have been crucified with Christ and so we no longer live but Christ lives in us. The life we now live in the body, we are to live by faith in the Son of God looking beyond the things of this world and looking to Christ to bring us peace and comfort.

The enemies of the cross place their confidence in earthly things, their affection on earthly things. Their hope and security rests in earthly things. They see the greatest things of all are earthly things. Their thoughts and concerns are for the here and now with little or no thoughts of the things of God.

They cling to the things of this world. Their hearts are distracted by the cares of this world. Their happiness is measured by what they have in their bank accounts or the stuff they have accumulated or in their health or in their success.

Like the zombies of last week, their soul is dead. They have no or very little interest in the things of God. Their distractions here prevent them from pursuing and finding delight in the things of God. They store up for themselves treasures here on earth rather than storing up treasures in heaven.

Jeremiah Burroughs in his book on the dangers of earthly-mindedness expands upon these and other dangers, spending 56 pages highlighting the signs of one whose focus is on earthly things and the peril by which they pursue such things.

Paul says here that it is to their destruction. Those whose desire is for the earth will find that to the earth they shall return.

Now of course, the reality is that all of us have some degree of earthly-mindedness. It is natural for us to crave certain things. The danger comes when those craving and desires and feelings for the things of this world outweigh and out love our things for heaven.

I mean think about. The things of the earth appear real to us, but spiritual and heavenly can seem like just a notion, they are an unseen reality. They require faith to believe in. Like the stars in the sky they appear small and faint because of the distance between us.

The other challenge is that we can easily look upon the things of earth as necessary. We need food. We need health. We need money. We need a job. We need a vacation. We need a newer car. We need the latest phone.

Do you see how easy it is to slide into a distorted mindset where we can be blinded by the ideas of this age as to what is necessary. And when we have gone down too far what often happens is that we don’t see the things of heaven as necessary at all but distractions that can be easily removed.

Prayer, that’s good but it isn’t necessary. Reading the Bible is okay, but it isn’t necessary. Worship and church, that’s fine once and a while, but it isn’t necessary for me. It can be easy to look to the things of God as good for our future, when we leave this earth, but not critical for our daily lives.

We have other pressing matters that are more important. My friends have you found yourself thinking that way. Have you said something similar to that? I know I have. That is the lie of Satan.

It is easy to be earthly-minded because Satan coats the tings of the world with sweetness takes our minds off spiritual things.

 --men’s gummy vitamins

Satan is smart. Much of the things of earth are like high fructose corn syrup that is designed to mask the bitterness of the world so that we don’t miss and long for heaven while we are rotting our insides and poisoning our souls with the rubbish of the world

Think of it this way. Babies have formula and then maybe move to something like cream of wheat. If we fed babies cream of wheat for the first five years of their lives so that their only understanding of food is cream of wheat and they never knew of anything else, they might be satisfied with cream of wheat.

But what happens when they take a taste of something else: like ice cream.

Cream of wheat suddenly becomes this bland, tasteless, gloppy substance that is more suited for wallpaper paste then food and they no longer want cream of wheat but they want to taste and delight in better foods.

My friends, that is what this world is like. Look around you. All of this is cream of wheat. It’s mush. It’s all really just bland but it is all we know until God opens the eyes of our understanding to see into the reality, into the excellency, into the glory of spiritual things that are ours in Christ.

Then all of the sudden, once you have tasted of things of God, by his grace, we should despise this cream of what, rejecting this world and pursuing that which is better.

And so the first cure to being focused on the things of the world, is to taste and see that the lord is good. Are you going to be satisfied with the dog meat of this world? Will it content you when you knowing that God has a feast planned for us in heaven and that we can enjoy even now the fruit of our faith.

Second, consider that if you could possess all the things of the earth that your mind and heart are set upon, there is not enough good in them to undo the pain and torment of an eternity in hell.

There is much truth to the saying that the man who dies with the most toys is still dead. Many spend this life time accumulating happiness here with no thought to preparing for what comes next.

Prayer and bible reading and worship and all that is absolutely essential when you consider the consequences of not being ready for eternity.

When you leave behind the physical treasures it is will your spiritual treasures that you take with you. Jesus talks about that in Matthew 6.

Consider that God has made you for higher and greater things than the things of this earth. Ephesians 1 teaches that God has blessed us in Christ with all the spiritual blessings in the heavenly realm.

Of all the creatures that God has placed upon the earth, none are capable of knowing God, none are capable of conversing with Him like man is. Surely God as made us then for more than to have meat, drink and clothes, and to live here. We were made for greater things than this.

God has created us with a soul that does not find rest until it finds rest in Him.

God has created us with a mind that is capable of building towers that reach in to the sky…minds that are capable of flying into space. We can harness the power of the water to make electricity, we can dig deep into the ground to retrieve minerals and oil.

The mind of man is too high and gifted to be exercised only upon the things of the earth. Our mind was made to contemplate and meditate upon our creator.

The soul of the lowest slave, of the forgotten child, the abused woman, the depressed teen considering suicide, the soul of the one addicted to heroin and strung out and high, that soul is still more precious than the earth, sun and stars, it more precious to God than all the silver and gold mines under the ground.

Put it all together and your soul is still inexpressibly worth more than all these, than why should we be content with settling for the things of this world when our soul was made to contain the Spirit of God, the glory of the Lord?

Consider this: Paul says in verse 20 that our home, our citizenship is in heaven. When you go on a trip you don’t take everything with you. Just what’s essential.

 --Hike trips with teens at camp (shake down)

 --why do you only take what absolutely essential?

 A little here will serve your purpose. In fact the less you have, the more fitted you are to survive the journey. In fact the Bible says that God has promised to provide the things that you need while on this journey.

Our heavenly father knows what we need and all of the earth belongs to Him, as well as the heavens will He not supply your daily needs?

 --Alan doesn’t worry about where his clothes come from? Why?

 --Is it all that much different for us when it comes to our Heavenly Father?

Can you believe that god shall give you His Son, and not give you everything else that you need? Does not godliness have the promise of this life as well as of the one to come?

Some will trust God with their souls, but not with their bodies. But is that really trust. Has not God promised that we shall not want in Him?

Colossians 3:2 says, “Set your affections on things above, not on the things on the earth.” They are opposed to one another.

Jeremiah Burroughs observed that a man cannot look up to heaven and down to earth at the same time.

Yes we have need for things while we live on the earth. But if they are what we truly need, then Christ says “ don’t mind them. Don’t worry about them.”

Your heavenly Father knows you have need of these things. We also have need though for spiritual things that fit us for eternity and we must not at any cost neglect the things of heaven for the things of earth.

For to do that, to be focused on the things of the earth make us an enemy Christ. Our home is not here, but our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait our Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ.

We cannot be looking for Christ in heaven and down to earth at the same time. You must choose which one is most important for you and I can tell that as you gaze upon the glory of Christ the things of earth grow strangely dim.

Pray

Plug for life group on Monday – five directions on how to get our hearts from earthly mindedness.