

September 3, 2006 by Steve Brandon



Seek the Things Above

Colossians 3:1

1. Jesus is Ruling.
2. Jesus is Waiting.
3. Jesus is Praying.

In 1980, Ronald Reagan was busy traveling all over the United States, campaigning for the Presidential election in November of 1980. His wife, Nancy, was also hitting the campaign trail. When Nancy came to Daytop Village, in New York, her life was forever transformed. It was in that city that she saw just how large the problem of drug abuse really was. She saw many children, who through drug dependency, had made a great mess of their lives. She saw how difficult their lives had become, and would continue to be. All of this stunned her and moved her heart to devote much time and effort for the rest of her life to the cause of reducing drug abuse in our nation and around the world.

After her husband was elected President of the United States, Nancy Reagan made a tireless effort to create an awareness of the drug problem in the United States. Her awareness campaigns took her to 65 cities in 33 states. She appeared on numerous television shows. She visited prevention programs and rehabilitation centers all across the United States. She wrote articles to appear in print. She even took her show on the road, visiting the Vatican and eight other foreign countries. At one point, she brought the world's leaders to the United States. In 1985, she hosted 30 first ladies from across the world to help expose them to the problem and educate them on how they might reduce the problem in their countries as well. The slogan that she championed was three simple words: "Just Say No." When speaking or writing, Nancy would tell those who were tempted to take drugs to "Just Say No." [\[1\]](#)

Eventually, this slogan was used to help stop violence, premarital sex, and a host of other vices that young people might try. Many have doubted the effectiveness of these campaigns since the drug, violence, and sexual problems have all continued to increase in recent years. It's difficult to know exactly how much the "Just Say No" campaign has ultimately helped. However, there was something very attractive about "Just saying no." It's an easy little phrase to remember. If followed, it will surely keep you away from the snares of many sins.

Many in the church have adapted this same philosophy in seeking to stay away from sin. You might easily call it "willpower religion." When temptation comes, people attempt to "Just Say No!" as if the power of the flesh can be overcome simply by will power alone. Too often, however, they find out that this simply doesn't work. They may have a genuine desire to overcome their sin. They may well know of the terrible effects of their sin. They may well hate the consequences of their sin. They may well know how much it is ruining their lives. They may well be ashamed of their sin. They may be putting forth great efforts to overcome their sin.

But, will-power religion simply isn't able to conquer sin.

He writes, ...

Typically today (and throughout history) the approach to getting people to do what is right is by telling them in a very loud, angry, and threatening voice, 'Don't do what is wrong!' We've operated under the assumption that if we portray the horrid consequences of sin in sufficiently graphic and revolting terms we will succeed in motivating the human will to turn from it.

I'm not suggesting that sin doesn't have horrid and devastating consequences. It most certainly does, now and especially in eternity. Nor am I suggesting that we cease telling people to abstain from sin or that we tone down the urgency with which we warn them concerning its deceitful and destructive ways.

But if all we bring to bear against the incredibly powerful allure of sensual self-indulgence is a "Just Say No!" campaign, we don't stand much of a chance. Any approach to resisting temptation that consists solely (or even primarily) of a teeth-gritting, fist-clenching, will-wracking resolve not to yield will ultimately fail. Or, if it does manage to succeed in the short term it will produce a joyless and mean-spirited legalism that will hardly prove attractive either to Christians or non-Christians.

What's missing in our battle with temptation? Without intending to be simplistic, it's the failure to understand the source of sin's allure. We sin because it feels good! Sin is hard to resist because it has a remarkable capacity to please. The author of Hebrews spoke of the "passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25; the ESV renders it "the fleeting pleasures of sin"). Granted, the pleasure sin brings is passing, transient, and fleeting. But it's still a pleasure! That's why we so readily yield to it.

The bottom line is this: when faced with temptation, the immediate gratification of sin will almost always triumph over the fear of its long-term consequences.

So how do we defeat the power of sin's promise of pleasure? Answer: by faith in God's promise of a superior pleasure! [\[2\]](#)

In other words, Sam Storms is saying that the way to conquer sin isn't by sheer determination. Rather, it's by placing before you something that you want even more than your sin. When that takes place, you will have the power to conquer your sin. You will be happy. You will be

joyful!

As we come this morning to chapter 3 in our exposition of the book of Colossians, Paul is going to become immensely practical for us. His concern from this point on is to teach us how it is that we can "walk in a manner worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:10). The exhortations to proper living are going to come fast and furious. He will address the passions of our lives (3:5). He will address our attitudes and our speech (3:8-9). He will call us to display a love for each other in kindness and patience and humility (3:12-14). He will call us to live all of our lives as followers of Christ (3:17). He will address the specific duties of wives and husbands (3:18-19). He will address the specific duties of children and parents (3:20-21). He will tell us how to act in the workplace (3:22-4:1). He will call us to lives of devoted prayer (4:2). He will call us to be evangelists, sharing our faith with those outside the church (4:5).

But rather than presenting a willpower religion that seeks to put off the old self and put on the new self by mere determination (Col. 3:9-10), Paul will seek to show how it is that a believer in Christ actually follows in obedience to his Lord. Paul's counsel is simple: Don't try to escape your sin through will power. Escape your sin by placing your thoughts and affections in another place. Those in Colossae were being bombarded on every side with advice of how to put away their sin. Some are being told that the key to overcoming sin is to keep a certain diet and celebrate certain days. Some are being told that a mystical experience is what you need. Some are being told that you need to buffet your body, and then, you will beat it into subjection. But, Paul says that these may have "the appearance of religion, but are of no value against fleshly indulgence" (Col. 2:23). It may look like it works, but it doesn't work. And so, in chapter 3 of Paul's epistle to the Colossians, he gives to the Colossians believers the way to overcome sin in their lives.

I invite you to open your Bibles to Colossians, chapter 3, to see Paul's counsel. Paul will give us the way in which sin can be conquered. It's not through rules and regulations and experience and pressure from others. It's through a heavenward gaze. Let's read Colossians 3:1-4:

Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.

In this text, we see the key to unlocking sin in our lives. The key to defeating sin is to divert your focus away from the things here on earth, and focus instead upon the heavenly realm. In verse 1, the clear command comes, "Seek the things above." In verse 2, a similar command comes, "Set your mind on things above." Verses 3 and 4 give the basis for these commands, "Your life is hidden in the things above." Three applicational points come flowing out of these verses. How can you overcome sin?

1. Seek the things above (verse 1).
2. Think on things above (verse 2).
3. See yourself as hidden above (verses 3-4).

The idea behind each of these exhortations is a heavenly-minded life, whose direction is God-ward. As the direction of your life is God-ward, the attraction of sin progressively decreases. I had every intention this week of getting through each of these points this morning, but then I realized how important these things are and have chosen to slow down. This week, we will only look at one verse this morning: verse 1. Next week, we'll look at verse 2. The following week we will examine verse 3.

The command is clear. We need to, "Seek the Things Above." (And thus, the title of my message this morning). This command is found in verse 1, clear as day. Paul writes,

"Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God." Paul's counsel is to "seek the things above." The "things above" are fundamentally the things that are not on the earth (according to verse 2). The "things above" are the things that transcend this earth. They are no less a part of reality. It's simply that these things are not visible to us. Paul is talking about heaven. He is talking about where Christ lives. He is talking about where the throne of God is. He is talking about the kingdom of God, the true spiritual realities. He is talking about the entire spiritual realm in which God dwells and rules and reigns.

When Jesus was standing before Pontius Pilate, He confessed to Him, "My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting so that I would not be handed over to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm" (John 19:36). Paul says that we, as risen believers in Christ, should seek the realm in which God lives, the things above. These words echo the call of Jesus, who told us all, "Seek first the kingdom of God" (Matt. 6:33). We ought to seek the kingdom, like a merchant, who travels the world, seeking for fine pearls (Matt. 13:45). It ought to be our pursuit. It ought to be our passion. It ought to be on the center of our minds always. The great byproduct of such a heavenly-mindedness is a life that will see victory over sin. We sing a chorus every now and then that goes like this, ...

Turn your eyes upon Jesus,
Look full in His wonderful face,
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim,
In the light of His glory and grace.

It's true. As you seek and pursue and passionately desire the kingdom of God, you find that the pleasures of this world are merely passing. Moses was a great example of this. He was raised in Pharaoh's house. He had unbelievable power in the land. And yet, he refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter (Heb. 11:24). Instead, he chose "to endure ill-treatment with the people of God [rather] than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin" (Heb. 11:25). You ask, "How was he able to do that? What allowed him to conquer his sinful desires for pleasure and ease in this life?" He considered "the reproach of Christ [to be] greater riches than the treasures of Egypt; for he was looking to the reward" (Heb. 11:2). In other words, Moses was seeking the things above, where Christ is. That was his pursuit in this life. Looking to Christ, the pleasures of this world were growing strangely dim.

Would the truth be known, this is always the secret of those who have overcome their sin and have been greatly used by God. They have all passionately pursued the things above. I have always been amazed at how the Christians in the early church overcame the persecution that

they received. They "endured a great conflict of sufferings" (Heb. 10:32). They were "made a public spectacle" (Heb. 10:33). They were thrown into prison (Heb. 10:34). They accepted the plundering of their property (Heb. 10:34) with joy! How did they do this? They knew that they had "a better possession" awaiting them in heaven (Heb. 10:34). They were seeking the things above, not the things on the earth. The things on the earth, like their reputation or their comfort or their property was not as valuable to them as was the kingdom of God, which they were seeking.

How is it that the martyrs die so well? It's because God promises them "the crown of life" should they continue to be "faithful until death" (Rev. 2:10). Their hearts and their minds are focused upon a greater cause. How is it that Jesus was able to withstand those mighty temptations of Satan that came upon Him when weak and hungry in the wilderness? It was because He was seeking the things above. After forty days of fasting, Satan asked Jesus, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread" (Matt. 4:3). Jesus quoted the Scripture, "Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God" (Deut. 8:3). Jesus wasn't seeking the physical things of this life. Rather, He was seeking the things above: the true bread of God, which is His word.

Satan tempted Jesus by saying, "I will give you all the kingdoms of the world, if you would but fall down and worship me" (Matt. 4:8-9). But, Jesus wasn't seeking a worldly kingdom. He was seeking the kingdom above, where God had plainly said, "You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only" (Deut. 6:13). By seeking the things above, Jesus was able to conquer the strongest of temptations.

How is it that Jesus lived a sinless life -- never sinning all of His days? Simply put, it's because Jesus wasn't seeking His own will and pleasure. He had subjected His own will to His heavenly Father. Jesus said, "I can do nothing on My own initiative. ... I do not seek my own will, but the will of Him who sent Me" (John 5:30). Jesus was seeking the will of the one who was in heaven.

How is it that Jesus was able to endure the cross? It's because Jesus was seeking the throne of God. When Jesus came to earth, he said, "Behold, I have come to do Your will" (Heb. 10:9). "Not My will, but Thine be done!" was His cry in Gethsemane (Matt. 26:39). When enduring the pain and the shame of the cross, Jesus set the joy of the world to come before Himself (Heb. 12:2). And how is it that we are to live in this life overcoming our sin and providing others with a victorious example of love to God? The same way: by seeking the things above.

When you have your sights set in the distance, it has a wonderful way of defraying the small setbacks along the way. I read this past week of Portugal during the 15th century. Due to the crude methods of storing and cooking foods, they were highly dependent upon valuable spices that came from the Indies. The only way for Portugal to obtain these spices was through a long overland route, which was governed by Arab traders, each of whom increased the price a little bit along the route. By the time the spices reached Portugal, they were very expensive.

So, Prince Henry of Portugal thought of tapping into their great expertise at sea by attempting to sail around Africa on their way to India. If successful, they would have found a way to cut out all of the middlemen who were jacking the price up so high. Unfortunately, they had no idea how large Africa was. When they began their quest, no European had ever sailed beyond Cape Bojador along the northwestern coast of Africa near the Sahara Desert. They never traveled further than this point, because of the reef there which throws up clouds of spray which mixes with the windblown sand from the desert and darkens the entire sky. The direction of the wind made passage very difficult. A myth had developed that man-eating sea serpents lie in wait beyond the darkened sky. If you happened to escape the sea serpents, the rumor was that the tropical sun would certainly fry you to death.

And yet, with Prince Henry's vision of seeking a way around Africa, Portugal constructed some swifter, more sea worthy boats. They also invented some new navigational techniques that allowed them to sail in open sea, without the need to stay within sight of land the entire trip. With these advances, Portugal sent out expedition after expedition attempting to get around Africa. After 15 attempts, they finally succeeded in passing Cape Bojador. They came to understand that the belief of the man-eating sea serpents was not true. Eventually, they succeeded in rounding the northwestern coast of Africa, traveling along the coast, east to west. They thought that they had reached the end of the continent. Soon, however, they found that the coastline began to run north and south again, for what seemed like forever. Actually, it was a few thousand miles. Time after time, they kept going further, and further until a caravan of ships captained by Bartolomeau Dias finally rounded the Cape of Good Hope and was heading north toward India. However, the shortness of their supplies and the poor morale of the crew forced him to turn back. A few years later, Vasco da Gama captained a convoy of ships which finally made it all the way around Africa to India, more than 50 years after Prince Henry had initiated the effort.

Along the way, there were many difficulties and setbacks. They had to face the man-eating sea serpents. They had to deal with poor weather and ships being lost. They had to deal with limited supplies along the African coast. But with each trip, they learned how to stock their boats appropriately. They even learned how to take a faster course to the southern tip of Africa, rather than hugging the coast the whole way. And with their ultimate goal of seeking India around the coast of Africa, the setbacks were eventually overcome.

Think for a moment about this: What was it that helped them continue on? It was a shadowy promise of perhaps sailing to India. They didn't know for sure how to get there. They didn't know for sure whether it was even possible. My point is that the efforts of the Portuguese are like our spiritual efforts. We have a shadowy promise of things to come. Sure, the promises are firm in the Scriptures and our hope is secure. However, we only know in part of the glories that await us in heaven. There are times that we don't even see it clearly. There are times when our sin discourages us. Through discouragement, Paul calls us to seek the things above. In fact, this verb is in the present tense and can easily be translated, "keep seeking" (NASB translation). Our pursuit of the heavenly realities need to be constant and never ceasing. When you stop seeking, your battle with sin will be lost. I long for us to be a people who seek the things above. Oh, my heart for all of us this morning is for us to be like David in Psalm 27:8. He wrote, "When You said, 'seek My face,' my heart said to You, 'Your face, O LORD, I shall seek.'" (Ps. 27:8).

This morning, God is telling you the same thing, "Seek My face." Will you this morning respond like David, "Your face, O LORD, I shall seek"? Is that your heart? Is that your desire? Is that what you want? Perhaps this morning, you find yourself saying, "Yes, this is what I want. Yes, I know that I should be seeking the spiritual realities in my life. I know that it is true. Yes, I know that I need to seek the things above. But, quite frankly, I find the things of this world more attractive than the things above. I find that it is easier to think about my sports team, or to read the latest news, or to watch the television, or to spend my time on trivial pursuits."

I know the tension. I live with it every day. Please don't think that, as a pastor, I'm any different than you are. My heart is torn to follow after the world, rather than after the things above. I like reading the news. I like watching the Chicago Bears. I enjoy surfing the Internet, killing many precious hours of my life. Now, it's not that these things are bad. We need to know what's going on in the world. It's OK to have a sports team to follow, or a television show that you love to watch or a way in which to relax and rest for a while. These things are part of the joys of life that God has given us to enjoy. But when such things crowd out your quest for the things above, you will easily find sin creeping into your life.

Do you know how to solve the problem? It's by making the things above more attractive to you than the things that are upon the earth, so that the things that you want to seek are the things above. Have you ever noticed the dedication of a die hard football fan? He will travel a long way to see his team play. He will sit in sub-zero temperatures to see his team play. After the game, he'll tune into the radio to hear the interview with the coach. Later on in the evening, he'll catch the highlights on the evening news. On into the night, he'll listen to the talk radio analysis. The next week will be spent reading about it in the newspaper and talking about the game with fellow fans. A few days before the next game, the anticipation will be high for the upcoming game during the weekend. It's not a problem to arrive at the stadium several hours early. It's not a problem that the game lasts more than three hours. Overtime is great, because it means that it's a great game and there is more football to be played. A football fan isn't tempted to spend game day afternoon fishing, rather than going to the game. One thing is on his mind: his football team. Other worldly pleasures can't compete with his devotion to his football team.

So it is with the kingdom of God. When your heart is thrilled with the things above, sin becomes less and less attractive for you. This is what Sam Storms was talking about in the quote I read earlier to you: "How do we defeat the power of sin's promise of pleasure? Answer: by faith in God's promise of a superior pleasure!" When your heart is convinced of the greatness of the things above, the things upon the earth begin to lose their glamour. Here's my aim this morning (in the brief moments we have together). I want to tell you of the things above. I want to make them so attractive to you, that they become more attractive to you than the things of this world. I want to so stir your hearts that it becomes easy to "seek first His kingdom" (Matt. 6:33). I want to so draw your attention to the glories of heaven, that the commands of the Lord will become more desirable to you than gold and sweeter to you than the sweetest drippings of the honey comb (Psalm 19:10). I want for you to seek the face of God (Ps. 27:8).

The exhortation comes here in verse 1 to "seek the things above." Particularly, we are called to seek the place where Christ is seated. Do you know where Jesus is seated? Do you know what Jesus is doing there? Do you understand the implications for your life? This morning, I want to share with you three things that Jesus is doing at the right hand of God.

1. Jesus is Ruling.

We see here that Jesus is "seated at the right hand of God." To place Jesus at the right hand of God Almighty is to place Him in the position of highest power and authority. God hasn't given this place of honor to any other man. God hasn't given this place of honor to any of the angels (Heb. 1:13). God has only given this place to His Son. And it is a place of honor and authority.

Jesus rules His kingdom from this throne. Turn back to chapter 1. We see in verse 13 that Jesus Christ rules over His kingdom. Paul writes of "the kingdom of His beloved Son" (verse 13). In verse 16-18, we see of how supreme the rule of Jesus actually is. We read that ...

...by [Jesus] all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things have been created through Him and for Him. He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. (Col. 1:16-18)

At the right hand of God Almighty sits Jesus Christ. Jesus created the world. Jesus created all authorities in the world, whether here upon earth or in heaven. Jesus existed long before these things. Jesus sustains the world. Jesus rules over the church. Jesus Christ has first place in everything. Jesus is ruling.

Paul also mentions His sovereign rule in chapter 2. Look at verses 9 and 10:

For in Him all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form, and in Him you have been made complete, and He is the head over all rule and authority;

In Jesus dwells "all the fullness of Deity." The reason why Jesus can reign supreme over the entire universe is because He is God. We believe in the Triune God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. One God--Three persons. I don't know exactly how it works: that God is one, and that God the Father is on the throne, and that Jesus, the Son, is at His right hand, ruling over all. But, it does work. Jesus is ruling. To be precise, verse 10 says that Jesus "is the head over all rule and authority."

2. Jesus is Waiting.

Not only is Jesus ruling from the right hand of God, He also is waiting. I want for you to turn in your Bibles to Psalm 110. The question might well be asked about the rule of Jesus, "How well is Jesus doing at ruling the world? How well is Jesus doing at ruling His church?" This world seems more and more anti-God every day. There are many in the church who are using it for their own gain. "Is Jesus really ruling?" The answer to that question is, "Yes, Jesus is ruling." But, in His rule, He is also waiting to fully extend His rule.

Look at Psalm 110, verse 1. David writes, ...

"The LORD says to my Lord: 'Sit at My right hand until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet.'"

Picture it now, God, the Father, says to Jesus the Son (who is David's Lord and our Lord), "Sit at My right hand ... until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet." God is saying to Jesus, "You sit here and reign over the world. But, your reign isn't a reign of dominion right now. You will be patient in your ruling over all the kingdoms of the world. Someday, you will exert all of your rule and authority in the fullness of your power. But, today, be patient. I have some work to do before you will be permitted to exercise your rule for the entire world to see. So, sit and wait."

In verses 2 and 3 (of Psalm 110), we see the day in which Jesus is let loose to wield His ultimate and complete rule over this universe.

The LORD will stretch forth Your strong scepter from Zion, saying, "Rule in the midst of Your enemies."
Your people will volunteer freely in the day of Your power; In holy array, from the womb of the dawn, Your youth are to You as the dew.
A day will come when the Father will say to the Son, "Your days of waiting are over. I have made your enemies to be your footstool. And now, go rule in the midst of Your enemies." As Jesus gathers his army together, He has willing followers. He isn't a dictator, who forces people to submit to Him. He is a benevolent king, who people love to follow. In the day of His power, people will "volunteer freely." Ultimately, this is what God is waiting for. He is being patient to allow time to pass by and to give people an opportunity for all men everywhere to repent and follow after Him (Acts 17:30-31). Romans 2:4 puts it this way, "do you think lightly of the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience, not knowing that the kindness of God leads you to repentance?" It's the kindness, the waiting, the enduring of God not to judge right away, that leads you to repentance. This is the heart of our benevolent King. He sits in the heavens, ruling the universe. When people are rebellious toward Him, He doesn't crush them under His mighty arm. Rather, He waits. He is giving opportunity for repentance and faith in Jesus Christ, His Son.

Perhaps this is where you are this morning. Perhaps you are at the point where you realize that you have been rebellious toward the Lord, seeking your own ways and your own plans, rather than His ways. Perhaps you have come to realize that God has not rewarded you as your iniquities have deserved. Instead, you have been the recipient of God's patience toward you in that you have received his kindness, rather than His wrath. If this is where you are this morning, I would urge you to cry out to Him, and seek His mercy in a day when He may be found. There will be a day when His kindness runs out. There will be a day when He will judge the nations.

Look down at verse 5,

The Lord is at Your right hand;
He will shatter kings in the day of His wrath.
He will judge among the nations,
He will fill them with corpses,
He will shatter the chief men over a broad country.
He will drink from the brook by the wayside;
Therefore He will lift up His head. (Psalm 110:5-7)

Though Jesus is waiting now, He isn't going to wait forever. When given the green light, His wrath will come upon the nations who have rebelled against Him. He will fill the nations with corpses (verse 6). He will do so with ease, quietly drinking His water by the wayside and looking up (v.7). Will this day of kindness and patience find you repentant? Or will you continue to test His patience? Knowing that Jesus is waiting and willing to receive those who come to Him should draw you to Him all the more.

What is Jesus doing at the right hand of God? (1) Jesus is ruling. (2) Jesus is waiting. And ...
3. Jesus is Praying.

Perhaps this fact about the current role of Jesus is the most important one in keeping you from sin. Look once more at Psalm 110. We read in verse 4, "The LORD has sworn and will not change His mind, 'You are a priest forever according to the order of Melchizedek.'" Here is Jesus Christ, at the right hand of God, being declared a priest. The role of the priest is to go to God on behalf of the people. If you would read the book of Leviticus, this would be very clear to you. The people were instructed to come to the priest with sacrifices for the sins that they have committed. They were to give these sacrifices to the priest, who would, in turn, offer them up as an offering to the Lord.

There were many different sorts of sacrifices. There were sacrifices for the first born son of a family. There were sacrifices when someone had been declared clean from their leprosy. You had individual sacrifices for individual sins. You had sacrifices for intentional sins. You had sacrifices for unintentional sins. Some were offered up daily. Some were offered up yearly. There were sacrifices every morning and evening.

On the great day of atonement, once per year, the high priest would take the offering and enter into the holy of holies and offer up a goat for the sins of the people. But, in all of them, the idea was the same. The people gave something to the priest, who then took the sacrifice and approached God on their behalf. Jesus Christ is our priest. He is our mediator between God and us. But, His priesthood is far beyond any of the priests of the Old Testament. First of all, His priesthood is forever. He will never stop being a priest. Once the priest reached 50 years of age, he was no longer eligible to be a priest (Hum. 4:3, 30, 30). But, the priesthood of Jesus is forever.

The sacrifice that Jesus offered up was greater than any sacrifice that was offered up by any of the Old Testament priests. They offered up unblemished animals. Jesus offered up Himself, the sinless son of God. Just as the priesthood of Jesus will last forever, so also will the sufficiency of His sacrifice endure unto eternity. His sacrifice ended all sacrifices. "Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous to bring us to God" (1 Pet. 3:18). For eternity we will rejoice at His sacrifice for our sins.

The only reason that we can come to God at all is because of His sacrifice for us. Apart from Jesus Christ, our coming to Him would be in vain. We have nothing to offer Him. In reality, we have nothing to offer Him anyway. The only thing that we can offer to Him is what He has first given to us. Another way in which His priesthood far surpasses that of the Old Testament priests is in His role of intercessory prayer. Surely, as the priests offered up their sacrifices on behalf of others, some type of prayer (or invocation) was offered up to the Lord. The Bible explicitly tells us that Jesus, as our great high priest, "ever lives to make intercession" on our behalf (Heb. 7:25). As Jesus is sitting and waiting at the right hand of God, He's not twiddling His thumbs, doing nothing. Rather, He is furiously praying for us.

Jesus is our mediator between us and God (1 Tim. 2:5). He has all the credentials to insure that His requests before the Lord are answered. Jesus is on our side. Jesus is praying for us. We are specifically told in the Bible to come to Him when being tempted by our sin.

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but One who has been tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin. Therefore let us draw near with confidence to the throne of grace, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need." (Hebrews 4:14-16)

Perhaps you are discouraged from past sin. Jesus prays for our forgiveness. This is the song we sang earlier in our worship service:

Before the throne of God above I have a strong and perfect plea.
A great high Priest whose Name is Love Who ever lives and pleads for me.
My name is graven on His hands, My name is written on His heart.
I know that while in Heaven He stands No tongue can bid me thence depart.

When Satan tempts me to despair And tells me of the guilt within,
Upward I look and see Him there Who made an end of all my sin.
Because the sinless Savior died My sinful soul is counted free.
For God the just is satisfied To look on Him and pardon me.

Behold Him there the risen Lamb, My perfect spotless righteousness,
The great unchangeable I AM, King of glory and of grace,
One in Himself I cannot die. My soul is purchased by His blood,
My life is hid with Christ on high, With Christ my Savior and my God!
In your fight with sin, knowing that Jesus is praying for you will strengthen you to overcome your temptations.

"No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man; and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also, so that you will be able to endure it" (1 Cor. 10:13).

Should this building catch on fire, there are many ways out of the building. If we are here in the auditorium, the escape is through the front door. If we are in the band room, the escape is through the side door. If we are in the gymnasium, the escape is through the back door. If we are in a classroom down the hallway, the escape is through the door at the end of the building.

When temptation comes, you may not know exactly how it is that you should escape the temptation. The smoke of the fire may creep into your mind and you may not be thinking straight. But, there is one thing that you should do: seek your high priest for help. "Ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you" (Matt. 7:7). "O, Jesus, help me now! Temptation is coming! I need your help! Keep it away! Please come and strengthen me! Help me to make the right choices. Help me to flee the immorality. Help me to give rather than keep for myself. Help me to love rather than to hate. Show me how much better it is to obey than to disbelieve."

When Jesus hears a prayer like that, He will turn to His heavenly Father and pray on your behalf. The way of escape will come. It will be clear where the nearest exit is. He will strengthen you to endure.

How simple is this? Seek the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. When temptation comes, seek Jesus. Perhaps we can redeem Nancy Reagan's phrase. Rather than saying, "Just Say No." Perhaps we could say, "Just Seek Jesus." This isn't willpower religion. This is desperate dependence upon a faithful promise.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on September 3, 2006 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1]http://www.reaganfoundation.org/reagan/nancy/just_say_no.asp
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Just_Say_No
http://reagan2020.us/biography/nancy_reagan.asp).

[2] Sam Storms, enjoyinggodministries.com.