

Looking to the Things which are Above

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 28 August 2011

Preacher: Alex Cowie

[0 : 00] Let's turn back now to Paul's letter to the Colossians, and chapter 3, where we were reading. And we want us to focus our attention on the opening verses.

If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Now, whatever else Paul is saying in these verses, verses 1 to 3 of Colossians 3, he's encouraging us to live life here in this world as those who live in Christ.

He says that we are to seek the things which are above where Christ is. He says you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

I want to just remind you as we look at this passage that the Lord's purpose in giving us profound teaching, deep teaching, deep doctrine, is not that we are baffled by that doctrine, but that we realize the reality of the union between the Christian believer and the living Lord Jesus Christ.

[1 : 50] And the stuff that's here in this passage is doubtless deeper than many things that are revealed in the Bible.

But it's really lying at the heart of what it is to be a follower of Christ. That's why we can be exhorted to live here in this world as those who live in Christ.

And the logic of that is for Christ as well. Paul wants us to recognize the reality of the faith union that the believer has with the living Christ, and to walk in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

And whether you view the truth here in this passage as the depths of divine revelation or the heights of divine revelation, the truth is to be searched out in order that we may be the better of it, and that our lives may be lived in a practical demonstration of that living union we have with Christ. And these verses in our text are geared for that. They're geared to, on the one hand, transport us to heaven, to the throne of God and of the Lamb.

[3 : 19] But it is in order to make us think about our life here and how to live it in the best way that honors Christ.

It is essentially deep doctrine that is to be of great practical use to us. It encourages us away from worldly thinking and earthly appetites and man-made traditions and man-made philosophies. And it's geared to focus us on Christ and how to live by faith in him. And I would say, on the back of that, as it were, that it's there to lift us up and to encourage us onward, to renew our attitude in serving the Lord Jesus Christ.

The days in which we live in are days that are really difficult, that are hard-going for the Lord's people. They're discouraging, they're distressing, they're weary.

And we need something like this to remind ourselves that we are to live life here as those who live in Christ and for Christ.

[4 : 43] Now, it's interesting and helpful to realize that when Paul wrote to the Colossians, he was addressing the very issues then that are around and about today.

And so this is so very relevant to us. He wants us then to think, first of all, about how best to live here in this world as those who live in Christ.

And the first thing he says is, by seeking those things above. Seek those things above, verse 1, where Christ is.

Now, the truth is, the Lord's people don't always do that. They may know it, but they don't always do it.

The Colossians do it, but it's clear they weren't doing what they knew they should do. The truth is, the countless Christians down through the ages have not done what they ought to have done.

[5 : 55] They've not lived sufficiently in this world to demonstrate that they live in Christ and for Christ. And often what happens is, they're moved away by other interests and philosophies and outlooks on life.

And I think in our day, we are as susceptible as any other generation, perhaps even more. And what we need to look at is how life here today influences us.

How it moves us from Christ. If you think about the time we've been together, six years, a bit more than six years, and you look at it and you think about, well, where am I today in relation to where I was six years ago when the minister came among us?

We could take a bigger span. We could take a shorter span. But let's just take the six years. We are to look at where we are in relation to the things we've thought about, to the truth that has been expounded in our healing.

Am I nearer to Christ today? Or not? We ought to be able to say nearer. And if we feel that we would like to say it, but we can't honestly say it, then you will see all the more the relevance of this.

[7 : 30] You see, the Colossians started off well. But earthly philosophies and legalistic forms of worship and belief systems crept in among them.

There were people peddling all sorts of things, and they were clearly in dire danger of turning away from the true knowledge of God and of his worship.

They were in danger of turning away from Christ. And thereby not living in him or for him. And Paul knows that if this were to happen and they were to continue on that road, then they would simply fail to walk in the ways of Christ.

And they would fail to truly live for Christ. And thus he warns them, If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above where Christ is.

You are to seek these things. You are to go on seeking these things. And clearly there were those in the church in Colossae, you only need to go back to chapter 2, there were those in Colossae who claimed new wisdom.

[9 : 00] They claimed something new, something better. Go back, for example, to verse 8 of chapter 2. Beware, verse 8 in chapter 2.

Beware lest anyone cheat you through philosophy and empty deceit, according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of this world, and not according to Christ.

That's very revealing. It tells us a number of things. One of the things it tells us immediately is, there are those who fancy their abilities in the realm of philosophy.

And philosophy is just a love of wisdom, as you know, philo sophos. It's a compound word, a love of wisdom. And they fancy that reality and our appreciation of reality only can be found out by the interaction of various philosophies, and we evolve on.

Paul says, beware of that. Beware of it, not just in general, though that's true, but beware of it in the church.

[10 : 22] Beware of it when it comes as some new thing. Paul had shown the people in chapter 2 that in Christ alone all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge were hidden, and they're hidden in him and revealed through him.

And you see, we are therefore to take to heart this, that we can so easily be drawn away. And there's abundant evidence.

You don't need to go outside of Scotland. The church in Scotland, I won't say more than that, but the church in Scotland has been bedevilled by philosophies, by new things, by new wisdom.

And the result of it over decades is that people have not been brought nearer to the Lord Jesus Christ, but they've gone further away.

And that can only be bad news. There's no evangelion, there's no gospel in that. So, there's no side of it, he's warning him of it.

[11 : 38] But another emphasis that comes through here is the danger of ritualism and also of legalism.

Verse 16 tells us there, in the passage, to beware of that.

There are those who are bringing in regulations. Verse 16, so let no one judge you in food or drink. You see, there were those who were pontificating.

And they were insisting on this or that religious right or rule. And if you didn't come into line, you were thoroughly wrong.

These things are a shadow of the things to come. But the substance, verse 17 of chapter 2, is of Christ. Beware, therefore, of these new things.

[12:43] Verse 18 tells us about the false worship that was brought in under the guise of something new and something better. The worship of angels. No, he tells them, hold fast.

By seeking and going on seeking the things that are above where Christ is. The danger, you see, is that our focus is on the worldly, on the fleshly, and not on the spiritual and the eternal.

The focus is on the carnal and not Christ. And he says that's wrong. That's dangerous to us. And so the way forward for the Colossians and for ourselves too, is to turn from these things.

Realize what they are. They're a danger to us. And so Paul, as it were, wings their thoughts heavenward.

Because that's where the living Lord Jesus Christ is. And they had to see that in him, in their union with him, they had a place in heaven.

[14:02] Their thoughts were to be heavenly, Christ-centered. That they were the children of the resurrection. Because as Christ rose, they had, as it were, in them the guarantee that they would rise bodily.

But they had the proof in them that they were spiritually resurrected. You who were dead in trespasses and sins, has he made alive in Christ.

You see? They had the reality of a spiritual resurrection. And they looked forward to their bodily resurrection in the purpose of God.

They were alive in Christ. Seek those things which are above where Christ is. Verse 3. For you died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Something has happened to you if you really are Christ. And so he wings their thoughts Christward. And they had to see, therefore, what they had by way of the resurrection power of Christ in their own lives.

[15:22] And that's something I don't think we give enough room to in our own minds. And often we are weighed down.

Unfortunately, I can speak about that too well. We are weighed down with our cares. Because we don't sufficiently seek the Christ things.

We don't realize what we have living in Christ. The Christ who is exalted. And as I say, the problem is, we are dragged down.

We are too earthbound. And what he wants us to realize is that Christ is in heaven. And by faith and through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, we are united to him.

In a real and true spiritual sense, we have a seat there with him. Paul says that to Ephesians, doesn't he? We are seated in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus.

[16:34] But notice here. We are to seek to remind ourselves of what we have in Christ. We have from him grace.

We have from him love. We have from him many qualities which he has communicated by his spirit in the word. And they must make the difference in our lives.

And they must be seen in our lives. When we read these things that we are not to be as we were reading.

We are also to read of what we should be. Chapter 3 goes on to talk about that. Not only to tell us what we need to put off, but what we put on.

And we are to realize that it is in Christ. And in seeking the Christ things that we are developed in wholesome ways.

[17:40] That is where we can be exhorted to be gracious and kind and tender hearted. And lowly and meek and so on. And long suffering.

And he says to the Colossians of old. And he says the same to us. This is the way to be.

When you profess Christ. You are to show forth these. The moral and spiritual qualities. Of those who. Go on seeking.

The Christ things. And as long as our mental strength endures. Even when our physical strength is failing.

We still can be like this. We seek and go on seeking the things that are above. The Christ things.

[18:39] And Paul was warning the Colossians. Because there was more than a little evidence. That they were going off the road. They were going out of the narrow way. Into the broad way.

What Bunyan called bypass meadow. And he seeks to bring them back. He seeks to show them. That they are becoming too worldly. Even in their religion. And he warns them. That they are to be. To be Christ minded. To be heavenly minded. To seek. The things of heaven. After an all. The saviour said. Didn't he. Where. Where your treasure is. There your heart will be also. And what is our treasure. If it is not Christ. And where is Christ. But in heaven. Where your treasure is. There your heart will be also. [19 : 38] And that must be. At the heart. Of our desire. To be in heaven. Sometimes you hear folk talking. Who have made a profession of faith. And they are talking about heaven. As a far better option. Than hell. Well that's true. But that's not why we should. Want to be there. The spiritual mind. The mind that's resurrected. The heart that's changed. Wants to be there. Because. His treasure is there. Christ is there. And we must. We must. We must come to want to be there. Because. He is there. Because. Of our interest in him. And our interest in others. Becoming like him. Just as we are. By faith. We are to. Seek to live for him. In this world. [20 : 39] By setting. By seeking. The Christ things. The things. That are above. And then lastly. By setting. The affections. Upon heavenly things. And there is a difference here. Between the seeking. The things above. And setting our minds. Verse 2 you see. Says. Set your minds. On the things above. That are above. We are to seek them. And we have looked at why. And the dangers. That would divert us. And then we want to think about. The focus. Of setting our affections. On the things that are above. Set your minds. On the things that are above. This idea. Of. Of. Of setting our minds on this. Has more than just. The intellect. That. There is the affections. There is. The. Our inner desire. [21 : 40] And we are to eagerly yearn. Says Paul. For the heavenly things. As those who in a wonderful way. Died. In Christ. At Calvary. Now at one level. We are out of our depth here. But the truth of the matter is. That for the. The total of the elect of God. From beginning to end. Of this world's history. That's true. It was true. In the purpose of God. In the mind of God. That. That. Believers. Died. In Christ. When Christ died. They died. Their sins were dealt with. The yet to be. The yet to be. Come. Believers. Those. Who died. Before he came. Who hoped in the promises. Concerning. And so on. [22 : 37] The. The emphasis here is on. On Christ the head. And the body. The mystical body. died. In the head. At Calvary. And that's why you see. We are to reckon ourselves. Dead to sin. And alive. To Christ. We are to have. A true. Biblical. Way. Of evaluating sin. In ourselves. We died to it. It. It. It. No longer. Has dominion. Therefore. Don't let it. Have dominion. That's. The truth. The matter. And we are to. Reckon ourselves. Dead to sin. And alive. To the Lord. And that. The logic of that. [23 : 35] Is we are to hate sin. In our lives. We are to be. Intolerant of it. In our sins. In our thoughts. In our thoughts. In our thoughts. We tend to look sideways. At others. And we see. Everybody else's faults. But our own. And everybody else's sins. But the thing that's important for us. If we are alive. To the Lord Jesus. We look at ourselves first. And we see that we have far too. Much familiarity. With sin. In our thoughts. And our words and actions. We are to hate that. In ourselves. And not simply. To criticise others. And says. Paul. To encourage us in this. Think about it. He said. Verse 3. [24 : 29] You died. And your life is hidden. With Christ. In God. You have a life. That cannot be. Understood. In any other way. Than that. Through the spirit of God. Through Christ's spirit. There is a living union.

Between you. Here on earth. Wherever you may be. And. The Lord Jesus Christ. It's a living union. It's invisible. But real. And therefore. You are to think. About your aliveness. In this way. That you. Will.

Endeavor. To set. Your affections. Upon the heavenly things. Upon the Christ things. Yes.

[25 : 23] You will seek them. We have looked at that. And considered. What can deflect us from that. But we are to. Set. Our minds. Our affections.

Upon these things. We are to focus. We are to make deliberate efforts. And we are to yearn more and more. For the heavenly things.

And it's important for us. That we think like this. That we remember the reality. Of a life. Lived here in this world. That is.

Wonderfully linked to the Christ. In heaven. That's what living in him. And for him.

Is about. We live in him through his spirit. And we live for him. By that spirit. It is.

[26 : 22] To be seen as something real. And effective. And something that governs our whole way of thinking. The hidden life.

The hidden life. Has to have. A visible indication. That it's there. That's why we're told.

Don't be like this. But do be like that. Be. Seeking. The things that are about. Be. Setting.

Your affections. Upon heavenly things. Live as those who live in Christ. And for Christ. And.

Although we know very well.

That this living union. This invisible union. Can't be discovered. The surgeon can't take his scalpel.

And find the point at which. It's.

[27 : 17] It's connected with heaven. The ultrasound can't detect it. The CT scan can't detect it. But friends. It's there.

If we are in Christ. Through faith. If we have been resurrected. Spiritually. In Christ. Then there is a reality there.

That. Has to have some. Outward. Indicators. And that's why it matters. That's why. You see Paul goes on. In verse 5.

Therefore. Put to death. Your members. Well you don't cut your arm off. But you watch. What you do. You don't gouge out.

A bit of your brain. You watch. What that brain thinks. And that's upon. You don't cut your tongue out.

[28 : 16] You watch. What you say. And so on and so on. In other words. We are encouraged. To be. Rigorous.

In dealing with ourselves. In this world. Which are on earth. And so. Sexual immorality.

And uncleanness. And passion. And evil desire. And covetousness. Which is tantamount to idolatry. Get. These things. Out.

Have no track with them. Be vicious against them. Deal with them. As those. Who keep seeking.

The Christ things. And who keep on setting. Our hearts. On the things. Above. Where Christ is.

[29 : 10] And there is no doubt. In saying all this. That earthly things. Too readily. Drag us. Downward.

They fix our attention. On the here and now. I. I. I. I. I. I. I. I.

I. I. I spend a minute. Around. More than a minute. To. At lunchtime. On. On. Flog it. Or something like that. And. I. I've said. To the family.

At home. You know. There's just. Such an abundance. Of these things. That's why. There's an abundance. Of these programs.

Nowadays. Of stuff. The young ones call it. Stuff. Of. Of. Of. Of. Of. Sculptors. Of.

[30 : 04] Jewelry. Of all sorts of things. Of paintings. You name it. It's there. And. Our eye fixes. Our. Our.

Appreciation of beauty. Is grasped. And so on. And. In itself. It's not wrong. To admire. Beauty. And. To be. Interested.

In these. Intricate things. That are made. The danger is. Of course. Is that we become. Absorbed. With them. And our hearts. Are drawn. After them.

And. And. Our. Our. Our. Energies. Are sapped. By seeking them. And our hearts. Are. Are. Drawn. To them. And. And. So. Instead of. Seeking. The Christ. Things. And setting. Our affections. On the Christ. Things. We are drawn. Away. And.

[31 : 00] It's such a subtle thing. Our time. Is absorbed. Our energy. Is absorbed. Yes. And our hearts. Our meditations. Are.

Are. Are. Drawn. Away. Remember. The story. Of. Of. Esau. The. The eldest. Of the two sons. Jacob and Esau.

And he came in. He was obsessed. With hunting. And he came in. And he was absolutely ravenous. And.

Jacob tricked him. You remember. He made lentil stew. And. Jacob said. You don't get many. Unless you. Unless you. Sell me. Your. Your. Your. Birthright.

Esau was totally. Absorbed. With. Here and now. And. And. And. The promises. God made. Weren't important. And he sold. His birthright.

[31 : 56] For a plate. Of lentil stew. He willingly. Gave up. What was precious. By far. More precious. Than. Here and now.

Things. The parable. Jesus told. Of the great banquet. Remember. Invite them in. And people made excuses. Oh well. You know. There's a lot going on.

In my life. I need to go and look at this property. Or. I'm putting that in the modern term. Means land. In the original there.

But. The emphasis is the same. Property speculating. And so on. It takes a lot of time. I have to go and see about it. Or. Well. I'm going to buy a new beast.

I need to go and test it out. New car. New something. Whatever. The emphasis is there. You see. And. And. There. There was too busy.

[32 : 50] Newly married. Of course. The. The point is simply. He was absorbed with family concerns. So that he was drawn away. From seeking.

The Christ things. And. Setting his heart. On the Christ things. And the bottom line is. They just made excuses. They minded earthly things.

It's not that they weren't to have a concern. For their family. Of course. They were to have a concern. But their focus was wrong. And.

The Colossians were being told that. And we're being told that. Again. And we need to take it to heart. We're to live as those.

Who. Live in Christ. And for him. To my mind. One of the most shocking. Stories in the gospel.

[33 : 51] That illustrates. How low people will go. Is the story about. The freeing of legion. From the horde.

Of demons that possessed him. And do you remember. When he was set free. Jesus. Put the spirits. Into the swine.

The pigs. And the pigs. Ran down the slope. And into the Galilee. And that was it. And the people. Wanted rid of him. Depart from us. Go away from us. Oh yes.

I know. The view that. They lost their living. But they lost more than that. By their insistence. That Christ. Depart from them. They sealed.

For themselves. Their future. The day would come. When he would say to them. When it mattered most. Not come blessed of my father.

[34 : 49] But depart from me. You curse it. Into everlasting shame. Well let us ensure.

That our. Energies. Are spent. In first and foremost. Seeking. The Christ things. And that we set our hearts.

On the Christ things. For where our treasure is. Near our heart. Will be also. May he bless his word to us.

Amen.