

Seek the Things Above

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[0 : 00] Let's turn this morning to that second reading to Paul's letter to the Colossians in chapter 3. And I just want to read with you and focus our attention this morning on the opening words of that chapter where 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 minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth, for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Particularly focusing on the first verse, if you then have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God.

There is a whole variety of terms and titles and words that the Bible uses to describe someone who follows Jesus.

Every one of those terms has its own significance. The Bible never wastes its words or its descriptions. For example, even the word I use there, a follower of Jesus, is someone who follows Jesus.

[1 : 33] Just as there were those who followed Jesus when he was on the earth as disciples. And that meant that they listened to him and that they accepted him and that they received him by faith as their saviour.

Then you have another description of someone who has been born again. Jesus said in John chapter 3, unless a person is born again, he will not see the kingdom of God.

And that again, that title, that term, has its own significance. It tells us what God has done in us in order to produce the person that follows Jesus.

We have been born again. Someone who has been born again is someone who God has miraculously changed. And it is the new birth, there is a new life for that person.

And then elsewhere in the Bible, we're called children of God. See, says John, what kind of love the Father has bestowed upon us that we should be called children of God.

[2 : 38] And that is what we are, says John, children of God. What significance? I don't need to tell you what significance that has. It means that as a Christian, as someone who follows Jesus, I can go to God and know that he will accept me as a father accepts his child.

And he will love me despite my wrongdoing, despite my shortcoming, and despite my sin. I am a child of God. And there are a whole, there's a whole variety.

There's a list of terms that the Bible uses to describe me. And in fact, it's a really interesting study. If ever you suffer from those elements of doubt in which you look too much into yourself without looking to Jesus, go to the Bible and do draw up that list of the terms and the descriptions that the Bible uses to describe a follower, a person who belongs to Jesus.

There's a variety, all of which is a huge encouragement to all of us, I hope. Now, here's another one. And look at what Paul says here. He says, if you have been raised with Christ.

Now, this term, raised with Christ, means exactly the same as every one of the words I've been using so far. It means a person who's been born again. You cannot be born again unless you are raised with Christ.

[4 : 03] You're not a follower of Jesus if you're not raised with Christ. This term, raised with Christ, is a term that describes the Christian, a person who loves and belongs to and is saved and is forgiven and has been born again.

This is just another one of those terms that the Bible uses to describe someone who is a Christian. But it has its own significance. Now, let's look at it. Raised with Christ.

And that's the first thing I want us to see today is the fact that everything that we are, every element, everything that's true about someone who's a Christian is rooted in the Lord Jesus.

It's oriented in the Lord Jesus Christ. And you'll notice, even from those opening words, those first three verses, Paul is giving instruction to people like you and me.

But every one of those instructions is rooted in Jesus Christ. He's not just arbitrary. There's not a list of what to do and what not to do as a Christian. But every one of them is rooted.

[5 : 12] And so it's as if Paul is saying, don't ever, from the moment you get up in the morning to the moment you go to bed at night, don't ever forget who you are in relation to Jesus Christ.

Look at what he says. If you then have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above where Christ is. Seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not things on earth.

For you have died. And your life, the life that you are, that's you, me, as we follow Jesus, your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Then he goes on. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. Now in these opening words, the focus is on Christ risen.

Christ risen. If you then have been raised with Christ, that's the first thing I'd like us to think about. Christ risen. But then as Paul moves on, he goes on to another dimension.

[6 : 12] And this time it's Christ seated. Verse one again. Where Christ seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.

So in the first place we have Christ risen. And then the second place we have Christ seated. Now whilst there is a relation between those two things, there is a difference between them.

And a difference in significance for our living. But then there's something else. We are to seek the things that are above. Where. Where Christ is seated.

So Christ is risen. Christ is seated. But he's seated in a place. Where. Where is the location of Jesus. I'd like us to look at these three things this morning as we come to this verse.

First of all, what does Christ risen have to do with me? Secondly, what does Christ seated have to do with me? What does it mean that Jesus is seated? What does that mean?

[7 : 07] And then, what does the place where Jesus is located have to do with me as I live my life, as I try to live my life from day to day to serve Jesus as a Christian?

What does it have to do with me? And what's the link between what Paul says here and with my life? So first of all, he tells the people in Colossae.

He says this, if. I want to stop there just for a few moments. Just that little word, if. That little word, if, makes us, just introduces an element of discomfort to us, doesn't it?

Because it implies that not everyone is raised with Christ. And that's absolutely true. Not everyone is raised with Christ.

Just the same as not everyone is born again. And not everyone is a follower of Jesus. And not everyone is saved. And not everyone is forgiven. And not everyone is today heading for heaven.

[8 : 09] Is this that wee word, if? If. And yet, there's a whole world contained in that word, if, isn't it? Isn't it? And it makes us feel just that little bit of discomfort.

And I would hope so if you are not raised with Christ this morning. Because many as a person through that discomfort has been brought to know and to realize how desperate their need is of Jesus.

And that's brought them, through that God has brought them, to trust in Jesus as their saviour. And the person who trusts in Jesus as his saviour and his lord is the person who is raised with Jesus. Raised with Jesus. Now, what does that mean? Why is it so important? Well, whatever it means, it's rooted in the resurrection. I think that's very obvious, isn't it?

That whatever Paul means here, he's going back. His mind is going back in time to three days after they buried Jesus and the empty tomb outside of Jerusalem.

[9 : 14] To where, when the disciples came and the women said, Who shall roll away the stone for us? So that they wanted to anoint his body as they did in those days. They discovered to their horror that the stone had been rolled away.

And when they looked in the grave, they discovered that the grave was empty. They saw an angel and the angel said to them, Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here.

He is risen. Come and see the place where he lay. And that is the foundation of the gospel. The risen Jesus is the foundation of the gospel.

And once the disciples had come to get their heads round, This impossibility that had taken place. And I think we'll all agree that if ever there is an impossibility in this world, It's for the dead to be

raised.

And yet, here it was, staring them in the face. The grave was empty. Not only so, but they met with Jesus. Later on, they met with him and they saw him face to face.

[10:18] So, it was quite obvious that Jesus had risen from the dead. And that became their preaching. And that became their joy. And it became the substance of everything that many of them gave their lives For the sake of the risen Lord Jesus.

Now, what Paul is saying here is that this is not just a fact that lies at the heart of the gospel. But it is a fact that lies at the heart of who I am as a Christian.

Because Paul is telling us here that there's a connection between my life as a Christian and Jesus' resurrection. In fact, if you examine the Bible, what you discover is that if you're a Christian today, That there's a connection between you and Jesus in every single element.

The Bible tells us that if we follow Jesus, we are united to him. We are united to him in his life.

We are united to him in his death. We are united to him here in his resurrection. If you then have been raised with Christ.

[11:34] You might say, well, I wasn't around. I wasn't even born at that particular moment. That's 2,000 years ago. How can that possibly be understood? It's understood in this. The Bible tells me that a miraculous thing has taken place in my life.

And that's that I've been brought to union with Jesus. So that his death becomes mine. And his resurrection becomes mine.

And as Paul tells us here, his ascension becomes mine. And we'll see that in a few moments time. But his death and his resurrection become mine.

In every possible way, I am united with Jesus Christ. Now that has a huge impact on the way that I live my life. It means that every place I go, Jesus goes with me.

It means that I don't go anywhere except Jesus goes with me. It means also, and this is the strange thing, things that's hard for us to get our heads around. It means that there is a sense in which by faith we are in heaven.

[12:43] Jesus is in heaven on our behalf. That's why Paul said in Ephesians chapter 2 that we have been raised to the heavenly places.

God has raised us to the heavenly places in Jesus Christ. Now, that's then what it means to be raised with Christ. Then, secondly, let's talk about what else Paul says here, that Christ is seated.

Now, we read in Acts chapter 1 the account of how Jesus, 40 days after he had risen from the dead, he took his disciples to a remote location outside Jerusalem.

And there he blessed them and he was taken up from them. The New Testament goes on to tell us that he was taken into heaven to be seated.

At the right hand of God the Father. That's what it tells us. Hebrews chapter 1 tells us that he was seated, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty, the glory of God.

[13:51] Acts chapter 1 tells us he was taken from them. Luke chapter 24 tells us that as they looked at this, they saw something. They couldn't understand exactly what was happening. And yet they saw enough to make them fall down and worship him.

What does it mean that Jesus is seated at the right hand of God? Well, it means, first of all, there are two things. First of all, it means that he sits as king.

He sits as king. There's something royal about this seating. Just the same way as when the queen gives the queen's speech.

You ever watch the queen where she gives the queen's speech and there's this majestic, royal occasion. And she makes the speech sitting.

And that's very significant. Because she sits on her throne, on her seat, that tells everyone who she is. And it's a symbol of the royalty and the rule and the authority with which the queen utters her speech.

[15:08] When Jesus sat down, he sat down as king, as one who rules. You might ask, well, in what way does Christ rule any more than he did before the foundation of the world?

Well, there's a very interesting answer to that. And the fact is that he rules over our hearts. There's a difference between his authority now and his authority as it was.

Because having come into this world to pay the price of our sin, the only way to do that was to lay down his life on the cross at Calvary.

But when he did that, he tells us he destroyed the work of the devil. That means he destroyed the power of the devil over your soul and over my soul.

It means that he set us free. And as free men and women and boys and girls, Jesus rules over us as the savior king.

[16 : 19] As the king who gave himself for us. And as the king who has set us free from the power and the guilt of sin. And who now rules and leads over us.

But the Bible also tells us that he sits as our great high priest. And the great high priest was something that goes back to the Old Testament.

When the high priest represented the people of God in their worship. And he was the one who would make sacrifice for the people of Israel.

By going into the tabernacle and into the most holy place. And he was the one who had put the animal to death. And he was the one who carried the blood of the animal in order to make atonement for sin.

The high priest in the Old Testament always represented the people of God. And Jesus in the New Testament represents you and represents me before God.

[17 : 23] Having once and for all laid down his life and made the once for all sacrifice for our sins. We know, and I'll tell you, this is where we come to the relevance of this chapter.

However, as we think of Jesus seated today in heaven at the Father's right hand. And as we think of him as our high priest.

We know for sure that our sins have been forgiven. And that God has accepted us because of him. Not because of us, but because of him.

And because of what he did on our behalf and for us. Yes. So therefore, when the devil comes to us and he tells us you're not really a Christian. You look at your own life.

You look at the weaknesses in your own life. Look at all the times you fail. Look at all the thoughts that you allow to come into your heart. Look at all the things that you say that are hurtful.

[18 : 21] Look at your behavior over the past week. And you can't possibly call yourself a Christian. You know, he tells us also, he makes you compare yourself with other people who look from the outside as if they're so much better than you are.

And he says, look at that person. That's a Christian. Look at the way that that person conducts themselves. Well, you only see how that person is on the outside. You don't know what's going on inside that person's heart.

You don't know. But the next time you're tempted to believe that way, you say, I have brought everything, all my filthiness and all my ugliness and all my shame and my guilt to God.

And I know that because Jesus has died for me in my place as my high priest, I know that I am completely forgiven and completely cleansed and washed and set free.

I know because I have been united to Jesus Christ. I hope we're beginning to see that what the Bible tells us about Jesus sitting in heaven today is not just an idea.

[19 : 42] It's not just some kind of mysterious reality. It's something that has a bearing. It's something that has a connection with the way I live and I think and I act in this world.

It's with the most precious truth. You know, when we think about Jesus tonight, today, I suppose automatically we think more of Jesus as he was in this world.

His teaching, the Sermon on the Mount, the miracles, the parables, the walking on the water, the changing the water into wine and so on. Quite rightly, of course, of course, that's what we read in the Bible.

Or we think of his death at Calvary. Quite rightly. There's no greater place to go to find the Lamb of God that gave himself for us. Or we might think of his resurrection.

But I think the chances are that we don't spend a huge amount of time thinking of him as he is today. Where he is today. What he's doing today.

[20 : 40] And I would suggest to you that we change that. We begin to think a lot more of what he's doing today. Of as he is right now.

The Bible tells us in Hebrews that as my high priest, he ever lives to make intercession for me. What does that mean? I think I've said, I've mentioned this a number of times before.

But it's worth coming back to time and time again. Hebrews chapter 7. It tells us that we have a great high priest. It tells us two things about that high priest. It tells us that he's taken from men.

That Jesus was actually human. He knew what pain was. He knew what tiredness was. He knew what disappointment was. He knew what betrayal was.

He knew what it was to feel devastated and isolated and alone and in utter darkness. Do you know what that means for us? It means that we can go to Jesus.

[21 : 41] That we can go to God as someone who knows. And someone who understands from his own human experience. You see, Jesus didn't leave his humanity when he went up to heaven.

Jesus took his humanity with him. He continues and will always continue to be God and man. Do you know how precious that is? Do you know how important that is?

That Jesus knows. How often are we tempted to think, I can't pray about that. God's never going to understand. You're tempted to think that, aren't you?

You're tempted to think of God as being way up there. Remote. But that's not the way that God is at all. Jesus knows.

We have a high priest that is touched with a feeling of our infirmities. That's the way the Bible puts it. He is touched. He knows.

[22 : 43] He understands. He's been there. You know, in any bereavement or in any sad situation, the best comfort you can ever get is from the person who understands from his own experience.

I've seen that myself. And that's the comfort that God gives. That's the comfort that Jesus gives. As someone who says, I know.

I know what you're going through. I know everything about it. He knows what it is to be tempted, yet without sin. But nevertheless, he knows the weight and the pressure of temptation.

He knows there is no one here today that can't go to Jesus and pour out your heart to him as someone who understands. But it tells us that he makes intercession for us.

Do you know what that means? I hope I'm not repeating myself. But to me, it's the most wonderful truth that it means that right now that there is a conversation going on within the Godhead between Father and Son.

[23 : 56] And you know what the subject of that conversation is? The subject of that conversation is me and you and us. Because the great thing about God, God in his infinite wisdom and his infinite power is able to treat every single one of us as an individual.

You know, for us it would be impossible. Even for me, I battle with this all the time of remembering different situations in the congregation.

You know, I forget one thing and I forget another because there are so many different situations and so many different illnesses and circumstances and everything and with the best will in the world even with the two of us.

There are people that slip through the net and we forget this and forget that and we just... But God knows everything about everyone and he is in there.

He's involved. Deeply involved in the lives of every single one of us and he will not give up. That's the love of God in Jesus Christ.

[25 : 08] He lives to make intercession for us. Now then, the third thing is the place where our lives are rooted in the resurrection of Jesus Christ.

And then, our lives are also rooted in Jesus sitting at the Father's right hand as our high priest and as our king.

But then, Paul goes on to say that we are to seek the things that are above. Now, this can be misleading if you don't read it right. The things...

We're not to think of heaven as full of things. In the same way as some of our houses are full of things. You go into someone's house and there's loads of things.

There's ornaments and chairs and tables and pictures and all of these things and you might notice the amount of things that a person has. That's not what we are to understand by this verse at all.

[26 : 15] It's not that we are as if we were to go into heaven today and notice a whole bunch of things that we are to seek. That's not the way Paul is speaking at all.

A better translation of this would be to seek the above. In other words, we're to focus our attention on the place where Jesus is.

Why are we to focus our attention on it? Well, if I just explain, because there's a bearing, because there's a connection between heaven and earth. But it's also the place that if we are followers of Jesus today, God is preparing for us.

God's ultimate purpose for his people is heaven. I go to prepare a place for you, said Jesus, so that where I am, there you may be also.

In other words, we're all on a journey. And that journey will only end once we arrive in the place where God is preparing for us as we speak.

[27 : 28] preparing for us that we one day Christ's greatest desire, Father, I will, he says in John chapter 7, that those who you have given me be with me where I am.

You know, we talk about the Lord's prayer as our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name. That's not the Lord's prayer at all. That's our prayer. The Lord's prayer is John 17.

Father, I will, I desire that those who you have given me in this world may be with me where I am. That's God's ultimate purpose for his people.

And you know, am I not right in saying this morning that we know what Paul is saying here? We can understand what Paul is saying and yet it's really difficult to get our heads out of this world and into and into heaven.

But that's not what Paul is asking us to do. He's not asking us to leave this world. He's not asking us to forsake this world. He's not saying that you're to hate everything that goes on in this world.

[28 : 49] He's not saying that at all. There are many, many things in this world that we love and people that we love and situations that we love. We love our families. We love our place of work.

I hope we love our place of work. We love serving the Lord. We love enjoying the things that God has given us to enjoy in this world. You see, some people will go to a verse like this and they'll say, right, that's it.

I want nothing more to do with this world. I want only to think of the next world. Well, that's just being completely irrelevant. That's not what Paul is asking us to do at all.

And in fact, the person who, if you ever want to know, if you ever want someone, an example of being in the world and yet not of the world, just go to Jesus.

Jesus was involved 24-7. He was involved with this world, with the people in this world. He ministered to the people. He cared for them. He spoke to them.

[29 : 48] The common people heard him gladly. He was approachable. There was no separation from this world. And we're not to be separated either. We're to be involved as the light of the world and as the salt of the earth.

And yet, Paul tells us that we are to seek at the same time the things that are above. We're to put away the sinful things.

He goes on to tell us. He says, put to death, therefore, what's earthly in you. Sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, covetousness, idolatry. On account of this, the wrath of God is coming.

These are the things we're to separate ourselves from. We're to put them away. And we're to seek the things that are above. How much time do we give?

I suppose it's true, isn't it, that, again, I speak from my own experience as well, that we're so caught up with the things that we have to do in this world, our priorities, our busyness, our work, our families, that we give very little time.

[30 : 54] But that's not the only thing, is it? We find it difficult to think about the place where God is preparing for those who trust in Jesus.

We find it difficult because we can't perceive, for example, we can't conceive of anything that's endless.

Everything in this world comes to an end. If you enjoy a meal, for example, you enjoy it, well, alas, it comes to an end. You are tired, you want to go to your bed, you go to your bed, and it comes to an end.

The rest comes to an end. You get up the next morning. Everything we do, it comes to an end.

There's a starting point and a finishing point. And I suppose that's what gives the kind of sense of variety that there is in this world.

And we get used to it, and we can't think of a world that is endless. We can't think of a world that's endless. We get, we're, we're, we get bored with this world.

[32 : 03] And we're tempted, aren't we, very often we're tempted to think, well, I don't understand how I can possibly spend an eternity and not, by seeing the same things day after day, hour after hour, I just can't think of that.

But that's because we're so limited in this world. And that's because we're so hopelessly unimaginative about the next. You know, when you think about it, when you think about even this thing about something that begins and something that ends and trying to cope with endlessness, if I was to, if I was to know, and who knows, but this is the case, I don't know, who knows how long any of us have got.

If I was to know that I was going to die today, what would I miss of this world? Well, I'd miss my family, of course, and the people that are precious to me in this world. And I would miss, I would be, what would I miss about the world?

I would miss not having seen and experienced all that there is to experience in this world. I don't mean sinful things, I mean the things, the way that God has created, you know, the places in this world that are thousands of beautiful, gorgeous, wonderful places that would take us thousands of years to explore.

aren't there? When you think about it. And the reason we can't explore them is because time is not on our side. Our age is, we just simply don't live long enough to be able to explore all the marvel of the world around us.

[33 : 45] We see some of it on TV, I don't know if you ever watch these travel programs where people go to these villages and they try out the food and they go to see these marvelous waterfalls and these cultures in the world and the world is such a fantastic place in terms of its culture and in terms of its variety.

Let me ask you this question. Do you think that heaven is going to be any less marvelous? Of course not. The same God who created the world in all its variety and wonder and beauty which we've only discovered a tiny amount of and we can only, even if we live to 80 or 90 and even if we go around most, you'll still only scratch the surface.

But I believe that heaven will be endless discovery of the marvel of God because God's going to create a new heaven and a new earth.

So there'll be no question of monotony or boredom or any other things that make us tired in this world.

It will be an endless wonder and endless sense of awe at the glory and the marvelousness of God.

[35 : 08] If this world hadn't fallen and again it's very foolish to go down this road but again I think it's sometimes an interesting thought. I often wonder if this world hadn't fallen would mankind have made the progress the technological the advancement of the progress that he's made in the thousands of years in which he's existed?

Would he have made the same progress in an unfallen world? I believe he would have made more progress. What has stopped us making progress is our sinfulness.

The wars for example the hatred the destruction the carnage think of the damage that sin has done to this world and think of the progress of I often wonder you know if we were to ask the Lord and I say this with all reverence what he thought of the progress that we've made in this world I think he would say you haven't even begun is that all you've been able to do?

Because we're so held back by our own selfishness and our own sinfulness but the place where God is creating and preparing for his people will be a boundless progression of discovery and newness behold God says I make all things new and there won't be a day even after a million years in heaven there won't be a day when that when the newness of heaven will not be in front of us those in front of us and where we won't be able to exclaim behold he has made all things new I could go on for ages speculating and I think this is what it means to seek the things that are above and to think about them and to remember that this is not pie in the sky this is a reality this is what God is creating and preparing for those who love him

I has not seen and I know that that verse is a little bit out of context I'm not sure if it is I has not seen not ear heard not as it entered the heart of man what God has prepared for those who love him the problem is that we're so attached to all the fading things in this world that we're not we're not thinking and what we need to be doing is as well as as well as doing what God wants us to do in this world we have to be looking we have to be preparing for the next and I believe that that means always keeping in mind you know when when you're going away somewhere supposing you were going on a long journey somewhere on a holiday on a day of easy travel this is possible but you know you never prepare that a day in advance it would be disastrous if you were to say to yourself well tomorrow I'm going to go to Australia well that would be stupid because you would have hardly any time to prepare and the trip would be a disaster you'd normally prepare it three, four months in

advance and from the moment you decided you would be organizing your life around that journey that doesn't mean your life stops doesn't mean you become neglectful but yet you begin to live each day in preparation for that trip and I believe that that's what

[38 : 55] Paul means when he says seek those things which are above keep them as the direction of your life make sure that they govern make sure that Jesus the risen glorified Christ governs and rules your life and everything in it the time is gone let's pray our father in heaven there's so much that we want to think about when we think about the place where God is where you're preparing for those who trust in you we pray lord that you will place it at the center of our being and we pray that you will direct and orient our lives towards it and lord bless your word to us now we pray in Jesus name amen