

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Christ's Focus: Things Above" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:31)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 10/20/2013

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Please turn with me in your Bible once again, if you are able, to Colossians chapter three, beginning at verse one. Let us once again today focus our attention on this great commandment of God for the Christian, given to us through the Apostle Paul. Colossians chapter three, beginning at verse one:

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. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:1-4)

We have noted many times in this series of messages that the words we just read are an imperative for the people of God. They are a command. These things are not optional for the Christian. They are essential for the Christian. And they are of tremendous benefit for the Christian.

And so, we have been asking the question, How are we to do these things? How are we to obey this command of God? We have seen that in order to obey this commandment we must first of all understand it. And we cannot truly grasp the commandment that we are given in these verses unless we truly understand who the Lord Jesus Christ is.

We cannot properly seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God, unless we understand who He truly is, because the

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"things which are above" have to do directly and intimately with the person and work of Jesus Christ Himself.

Lie About Christ in the Contemporary Church

We have seen that this is a great problem in the church today. We have seen that there is, in the present-day church, confusion about who Jesus Christ is. There is a tragic tendency in the church today to debase the deity of the incarnate Christ. And, there is a corresponding tragic tendency to speak of the humanity of Christ in ways that Scripture does not permit, because those ways of speaking of Jesus Christ actually deny aspects of His deity.

More and more of this in the church today crosses the line into blasphemy. More and more of what is said in the church today actually speaks evil of the name of Jesus Christ. It is sad but true, dear friends, that in our time, many lies about the Lord Jesus Christ are being spoken from behind a pulpit, from the platform of a church.

There is the lie going about today which says that God the Son became something less than fully God when He came into this world in a human body. There is the lie that Jesus gradually became aware that He was God as He grew up, when the fact is that even the baby growing in Mary's womb contained all the fullness of the Godhead in a body.

And then there is the lie that is taught in some churches today, that Jesus

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gradually acquired supernatural powers as He grew up, when in fact He had merely laid aside the prerogative of the full and constant use of His almighty powers so that He might live among men.

And then there is the lie that Jesus developed and employed a favorable opinion of the Scriptures, instead of proclaiming the truth that Jesus Christ Himself, the Second Person of the Trinity, is the Author of all Scripture. He called it "My Word". He is the absolute authority that is behind and beneath and within every word of Scripture. And Scripture itself calls our Lord Jesus Christ "the Word" - the Logos - the very Word of God come into the world in human form - the God-man who shows us the Father, who exegetes the Father for us. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father" (John 14:9).

Christ Is the Testing Point

Dear friend, do not listen to any pastor or teacher who denies or denigrates the full and absolute deity of the Lord Jesus Christ in any way. First John 2:22 declares to us, "Who is a liar but he who denies that Jesus is the Christ? He is Antichrist..." In First John chapter four beginning at verse one, God tells us this:

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh [that is, every spirit that confesses the truth about the incarnation of Christ] is of God, and every spirit that

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does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh [that is, every spirit that does not confess the truth about the incarnation of Christ, but brings falsehoods into the church, that person] is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world. (1 John 4:1-3)

Christ Himself is the testing point of all truth. In order to "seek those things which are above, where Christ is," we must understand who Jesus Christ is. Furthermore, we must also understand what Jesus Christ says. We especially need to understand that Jesus Christ tells us that we must have this Heaven-ward orientation. We find it throughout the pages of the Gospels, in the words and the works of Jesus Christ Himself.

And so today, I want to focus your attention on these things. I want to do that by calling your attention to four propositional truths that we find in the Gospel record. Four propositional truths about that nature of all things. And we are given these four great truths from the mouth of the incarnate Lord Jesus Christ Himself. Let me state them for you, first of all, and then we shall examine each one in more detail.

- Proposition number one is this: Jesus Christ declared His own heavenly origin and nature.
- Proposition number two: Jesus declared the heavenly origin and nature of our salvation.

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- Proposition number three: Jesus Christ declared the imperative, the necessity, of a Heaven-ward orientation in the believer's life and thinking while we are on this earth.
 - And proposition number four: Our Lord Jesus Christ declared that Heaven, the life to come, is the goal of all things.

If you are to truly be equipped to "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God" - if you are to truly "set your mind on things above, not on things of earth" - if you are to truly understand that "you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God" - if you are to truly understand that "when Christ who is our life appears, you also will appear with Him in glory" - then dear friend, you must understand what the Lord Jesus Himself says about these things. And so, let us briefly look at each of these great things, these fundamental truths, from the words of our Lord Himself.

Christ Declared His Own Heavenly Origin

First of all, our Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly declared His own heavenly origin. Let me point you to several passages where our Lord speaks of this. In John chapter 3, verse 13, Jesus said this to Nicodemus, speaking of Himself. He said:

No one has ascended to Heaven but He who came down from Heaven,
that is, the Son of Man who is in Heaven.

Jesus clearly and unequivocally declared that He had come down from Heaven.

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He also said that God the Father so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son (John 3:16). This is a repeated theme throughout the Gospel of John in particular. Jesus Christ, the incarnate Son of God, is who He is and did what He did as the gift of God the Father. The saving work of Jesus Christ is the gift of God, sent from Heaven.

Furthermore, later in His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus said this in John chapter 3 verse 31:

He who comes from above is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth. He who comes from Heaven is above all. (John 3:31)

Jesus repeated this theme in John chapter 8 verse 23, when He said to the scribes and Pharisees, the unbelieving religious teachers of that day:

He said to them, "You are from beneath; I am from above. You are of this world; I am not of this world. (John 8:23)

The authority of Jesus Christ, the position of Jesus Christ, the power of Jesus Christ, all rest upon the fact that He is from above. No one who was of mere earthly origin could speak the things that Jesus spoke or do the things that Jesus did. And what did Jesus come to do? He tells us in John chapter 6 verse 38:

For I have come down from Heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 6:38)

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Jesus also said that He is the Bread of Life. Now we often hear those words said in evangelical churches. But take note of the origin of the Bread of Life. Jesus said this, John chapter 6 beginning at verse 50:

This is the bread which comes [notice] down from Heaven, that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread which came down from Heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."
(John 6:50-51)

We also find Jesus on many occasions lifting up His eyes to Heaven, once again emphasizing the great fact that He is from Heaven. We read in Matthew chapter 14 that when Jesus miraculously fed the five thousand, that

He took the five loaves and the two fish, and looking up to Heaven, He blessed and broke and gave the loaves to the disciples; and the disciples gave to the multitudes. (Matthew 14:19)

We also find in Mark chapter seven that when the people brought to Jesus a man who was deaf and had an impediment in his speech, that Jesus healed him in this way: "...looking up to Heaven, He sighed, and said to him, 'Ephphathah,' that is, 'Be opened' " (Mark 7:34). Jesus' power to perform miracles was heavenly power.

And when Jesus came to the end of His earthly ministry, in His great high priestly prayer of John chapter 17, we read beginning in verse one that

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Jesus spoke these words, lifted up His eyes to Heaven, and said: "Father, the hour has come. Glorify Your Son, that Your Son also may glorify You, as You have given Him authority over all flesh, that He should give eternal life to as many as You have given Him. And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.

I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was. (John 17:1-5)

These are just a few of the occasions on which Jesus plainly declared His heavenly origin, and all that His heavenly origin signified. So this is the first proposition, that the Lord Jesus Christ repeatedly declared His heavenly origin, and the reasons why it was so vastly important.

Christ Declared the Heavenly Origin of Salvation

And not only this, proposition number two, our Lord Jesus declared the heavenly origin of salvation. We have already seen this in a previous message. In John chapter 3, verse three, Jesus declared to Nicodemus that "unless one is born again [literally, born from above], he cannot see the kingdom of God."

Even when Jesus was standing before Pontius Pilate, just before He went to the

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cross to accomplish our salvation, Jesus said to Pilate:

You could have no power at all against me [to pronounce a sentence of death, and to send Me to the Cross] unless [notice] it had been given you from above. (John 19:11)

The Apostle Peter repeated this in his great sermon on the day of Pentecost in Acts chapter 2. He said, Acts chapter 2 verse 23, that Jesus was "delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God." Our salvation was and is the great plan of the triune God, Ephesians chapter 1 tells us, from "before the foundation of the world" (Ephesians 1:4).

There is nothing of man and there is nothing of earth in our salvation. No human work can accomplish it. No human ritual can apply it to an individual. Our salvation is entirely the plan of Heaven and the work of Heaven. And so God in Christ came down from Heaven, invaded, as it were, Satan's present domain, this sin-cursed world, and God from Heaven defeated Satan at the Cross and accomplished deliverance from this present evil world into the perfect world to come for all who will believe on Christ.

Christ Declared the Heavenward Orientation of the Christian's Life on Earth

And not only did Jesus declare His own heavenly origin and the vital importance of it; not only did Jesus declare the heavenly origin of our salvation; He also declared the imperative of a heavenward orientation for the believer in

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Christ while you are living on this earth.

When Jesus taught His disciples, and us, how to pray, He taught us to pray to our Father in Heaven. Jesus said repeatedly in the Gospels that we are to ask for our needs from the Father in His name – in Jesus' name – because Jesus, the ascended victorious Christ, would be at the right hand of the Father interceding for us as we live life in this world.

Jesus also declared that He and the Father would send the Spirit from Heaven to live in each and every believer in Christ, to open the Scriptures for us, to open our understanding of the Word, and to give us power to be His witnesses in this world, and to think and to live not according to the pattern of things on this earth but according to the pattern of things in Heaven.

Jesus also commanded that even as we are dealing with our earthly obligations in this world we are never to forget our obligations to God in Heaven. Jesus said, Matthew chapter 22 and verse 21, "render therefore to Caesar the things which are Caesar's; and to God the things that are God's."

And Jesus also said that this is to be the pattern of our thinking, the pattern of our values, as we live life on this earth. Matthew chapter 6 beginning at verse 19:

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in Heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where

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thieves do not break in and steal. (Matthew 6:19-20)

The Christian's way of thinking is to be an entirely different way of thinking from the way of this world. The Christian's values are to be an entirely different set of values than the values of this world. The Christian's way of thinking is to be oriented toward Heaven. The Christian's values are to be the values of Heaven.

Christ Declared the Heavenly Goal of All Things

And that is because, proposition number four, Jesus Christ and the written Word of God repeatedly declare the heavenly goal of all things.

Jesus repeatedly spoke and taught concerning the kingdom of Heaven. He said, "My kingdom is not of this world." Every time His followers tried to make Jesus an earthly king, He resisted and refused them. He kept pointing them to the fact that His kingdom is not of this world, but of Heaven and of the world to come. Jesus said, at the beginning of John chapter 14:

"I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also. And where I go you know, and the way you know." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going, and how can we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." (John 14:1-6)

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This is the ultimate restoration of all things that is spoken of in Colossians chapter 1, beginning at verse 19:

For it pleased the Father that in Him [in Jesus] all the fullness should dwell, and by Him to reconcile all things to Himself, by Him, whether things on earth or things in Heaven, having made peace through the blood of His cross. (Colossians 1:19-20)

Are These Things the Focus of Your Life?

Dear friend, if you are a Christian today, are these things the focus of your life? Do you understand the heavenly nature of Jesus Christ? Are you depending upon Heaven for salvation? Are you depending upon the resources of Heaven for life in this world? Do you recognize that life in this world is preparation for the life to come in the New Heavens and New Earth for eternity? Are you living with these things constantly in mind?

Are you seeking those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God? Or are you living merely for the things of this earth? If you are to live a life that is pleasing to your Father in Heaven, your thinking and your living must constantly have the heavenly orientation that Christ commands of us.

Our problem is not that we are in danger of becoming so heavenly-minded that we will be no earthly good. Our problem is that we are in constant danger of being so earthly-minded that we will forget about our Savior.

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Let it not be so with you, dear Christian. "Seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." For "when Christ who is our life appears, you also will appear with Him in glory."

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The Scripture-Driven Church airs each week across the United States and around the world. Our goal is that of the Great Commission: to preach the Gospel to the world, and to equip believers to stand upon and live by the sole authority of God's Word, to the glory of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

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