

December 30, 2018
Sunday Evening Service
Fifth Sunday
Community Baptist Church
643 S. Suber Road
Greer, SC 29650
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EAGLES OR DEER Colossians 3:1-4

Have you ever watched an eagle walk? It looks quite odd as it kind of plods or waddles along. An eagle walking strikes me as having the grace of the fictional Quasimodo from Victor Hugo's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*. The eagle's great strength or forte is not earthbound. It excels in the sky. Watch an eagle catch the updrafts and soar almost out of sight. It is graceful, beautiful, the picture of strength and beauty. God did not make eagles for walking on earth, but for soaring in the heights of heaven.

Now deer, they are a different creature than eagles. They really don't fly well in spite of what you were told by fantasizing people over and over for the past several weeks. God made deer to run on the earth, and they are a most graceful creature as they run. But again, they don't fly like eagles.

It is interesting that God who created both of these beautiful, graceful creatures mentions them in the Scripture as examples or pictures of those recipients of His grace who He raises up from the mundane earthiness to live in the realms above. God encourages us to wait on Him so that He can lift us up as eagles. God promises that *They who wait for the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint (Isaiah 40:31)*.

As to the picture of the graceful deer, even they are not content to dwell in the dark valleys of earthiness. David confessed that God, *He made my feet like the feet of a deer and set me secure on the heights (Psalm 18:33)*. Even on the heights the deer is graceful by God's help and through the strength He gives.

And so as we apply the pictures of the graceful eagle soaring in the heights of heaven and the graceful deer walking the mountain heights, we must remember that God's desire for us is to rise above the mundane. We are indeed earthbound (in a spiritual sense) in this fleshly body. But in our souls we need to, as our text says, *seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (v.1b)*. How can we do that? *By setting your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (v.2)*.

This is a good challenge for us as we are about to enter a new year. Let's make seeking a closer walk with God the goal for Community Baptist Church in 2019. That is a good challenge for the members who make up the church not the organization.

The Challenge (v.1).

The challenge of our text is based on a presupposition. The opening statement, *If then you have been raised with Christ (v.1a)*, does not present a hypothetical possibility but a reality. Born again believers are raised with Christ. On one hand, being raised with Christ is figurative. Christ's resurrection was the first fruits, an indication that others will follow (1 Corinthians 15:23). At the same time, we who trust Christ are raised with Christ spiritually because we were buried with Christ in our death to sin (Romans 6:3). And too, as Christ was raised physically, we are raised with Him, figuratively to walk in a new lifestyle (Romans 6:4).

On the other hand, being raised with Christ is literal. Again, the text actually says, *"since" you have already been raised with Christ*. Followers of Christ look forward to a literal, physical resurrection in the future that is secured in Christ. It is true that Christ has already raised us up spiritually (it's real) so that we are enjoying spiritual blessing from Him who is literally seated in heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3,20). It is also true that Christ has already raised us out of the spiritual deadness of sin to walk in light and life.

Since we have been raised up with Christ, we are challenged by our text to seek Christ. We are to *seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God (v.1)*. Christians are certainly aware that Christ is now in the presence of God. However, if that is true, what do we do with the Bible teaching that reveals that

Christ is omnipresent – in all places at all times? Jesus promised the disciples and, therefore, us, “*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I among them*” (Matthew 18:20). It is true that He has ascended to the Father and is at the Father’s right hand, the place of authority. We are greatly assured by the fact that Christ is especially right now seated at the right hand of the Father where He intercedes for us.

It is in that place where Christ is seated that we are to seek the presence of God. That is what it means to *seek the things that are above, where Christ is (v.1a)*. It is a reminder that some things are “above.” “Above” kind of things are spiritual matters, things that demonstrate the character of Christ. The things that are above is the fruit produced by the Holy Spirit’s influence. Paul described such things as *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law (Galatians 5:22-23)*.

Therefore, such “above” kind of things should dominate our thinking. *Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things (Philippians 4:8)*.

Things like that are contrasted with the fleshly things, the things equated with this earth that is passing away. The flesh is passing away. *Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:19-21)*.

The things of this world are passing away kind of things. *For all that is in the world – the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride in possessions – is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever (1 John 2:16-17)*.

So how do we seek the things that are above? We seek these traits as we are seeking Christ. Our resource for right living is Christ. Seek Him and you will find the “things that are above.”

The Method (v.2).

But what method do we use to seek Christ who is above? *Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth (v.2)*. The norm for humans is to seek things on earth. That is largely because “earthness” is the limitation of the sinful nature. The problem is that things of earth are passing away. So, obviously there is an identifiable difference between things of earth and thing above. But that doesn’t matter to most people. Because the earth is the focus of the sinful nature, the passing things of earth is the goal of sinful people.

That explains why or how “earthness” is the essence of life for most people. Achieving, grasping, collecting, hoarding passing stuff, education, portfolios, experiences is life to sinful people. People are identified with passing things. For example, the athlete whose desire is to win a gold medal at the Olympics will live a life so focused, so identified with that goal that nothing else seems to matter. The same is true for the person who seeks to build a multi-million dollar portfolio. And the same thing can be said for the person who seeks to achieve multiple advanced degrees in order to be acceptable to others. And on and on the list goes to include the desire to live in the right neighborhood, or seeking to have the right and acceptable associations, and being part of the right club or contributing to the right social causes.

Goals and desires like these set the identity of people in spite of the fact that all of this kind of stuff will pass into oblivion. It can accurately be said of people who pursue such things with a passion that “This is their life.” It is what they live for.

God expects radically different goals for His people. God’s plan is for His people to set their minds on things that are above. That process of “setting the mind” requires effort. It means that we must keep our minds under control. That is a major challenge for us who live in a fleshly body and sinful world. It begins by us considering ourselves to be dead to the world, unresponsive to passing things, even to self. And if we are really dead to passing things, we will not only draw that conclusion, but keep coming back to it. This must be our practice before we can fairly represent Christ to the world.

“Paradoxically, before a Christian can reach the world, he must first leave the world.” (John MacArthur, Colossians, p.125).

Considering ourselves dead to the passing things is a continual process. Paul expressed it like this to the Christians in Rome: *I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect (Romans 12:1-2).*

How do we pull this off consistently? How do we keep setting our minds on things above? We should engage certain practices that facilitate controlled thinking. Some of these practices are so simple and expected that we gradually ignore them. We are more likely to set our minds on Christ if we read the Bible regularly, systematically and call to mind the things we read. It helps if we take notes while we read the Bible and periodically review the notes. Ask the Lord to keep the truth you read fresh in your mind throughout the day. In short, we are more likely to seek Christ when we talk to God about His Word—and everything else in life.

The Reason (v.3).

In verse three God gave us a good reason for seeking things above. *For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God (v.3).* This does not mean that we have died physically, but that we have died to self. At salvation we are crucified along with Christ. How does that work? Christ died because of our sins. When we acknowledge our sin, we are identified with His death for our sins. That is what Paul meant when he wrote, *Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? (Romans 6:3).*

Admitting at a point that we are guilty of sin and that Christ died because of our guilt is one thing. Living crucified is another challenge altogether. We need to come to acknowledge the certainty that we are fully identified with Christ’s crucifixion in our behalf is certain. We need to admit and mean the truth, *I have been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me*

(Galatians 2:20a). And then by Christ’s grace meet the challenge of living out that reality so that we can also say, *And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Galatians 2:20b).*

When we maintain that kind of relationship with Christ, we are identified with Him, not with the passing world. It is important to understand that for Christians, Christ is our identity. Most people are identified with something or someone in life. We all tend to be that way. But in reality, our identity is to be Christ.

That confidence is more likely when we reckon ourselves hidden in Him. This means that Christ hides us away like putting something most valuable in safe keeping. Sin and Satan cannot own us or condemn us for eternity because Christ hides us in Himself. Also because we are hidden in Christ the world is baffled by us. We are hard put to understand this, and it is very difficult to explain the reality in common terms. And if we are hidden in Christ, we are also hidden in God.

The Hope (v.4).

While we set our minds on the things of Christ, we look to the future with hope. Our hope is, *When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (v.4).* The certainty is that Christ is coming again. We are not certain of the details. Prophecy of last things, last times are difficult to comprehend. In spite of all the theories, it is likely that no one has concluded exactly how things will work out. But we know that Christ is coming again.

And while we hope in Christ’s return, we are certain of the relationship we have with Him. He has promised that He will come back for His own. He has given us the Holy Spirit to remind us that we are His own. He has given us the Bible to teach us what characterizes His own.

Therefore, we are also certain that when He comes, Christ’s followers share His glory. The coming glory is Christ’s glory. We look forward to His glorification. We look forward to sinners having to acknowledge our Savior’s glory. We look forward to eternal glory. But the amazing thing is that Christ graciously includes us in His

coming glory. What astonishing grace that Christ includes us in His glory. If we suffer with Him, we will reign with Him.

Because we have this hope, we intentionally direct our thinking toward Christ and eternal things. Therefore our goal, our prayer, our desire should be similar to what William Cowper expressed in the hymn he wrote in 1772:

*O for a closer walk with God,
A calm and heavenly frame,
A light to shine upon the road
That leads me to the Lamb!*