

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Truth: What Heaven Demands" (Colossians 3:1-4, John 3:27-36)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

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Please turn with me, if you are able, to our theme passage for this series of messages, Colossians chapter three, beginning at verse one. 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)

### **The Christian Mind: Synchronized With Heaven**

The passage we have just read is one of the central statements in the Word of God that tells us where we must focus our attention. We are to "seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." We are to "set our minds on things above."

In the original Greek, Colossians chapter three verse two reads like this: "The things above mind, not the things on earth." The verb that is translated "set your mind" in the New King James translation, or "set your affection" in the Authorized Version, denotes several things that are to be true of the thinking of the believer. It tells us that we are to *submit our thinking to Heaven* and not to the things of earth. It tells us that there is to be an *element of humility* in that submission of our thinking.

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"Set your mind on things above." The verb that is translated "set your mind" tells us that we are to *synchronize our thinking* with Heaven and not with this world. It also speaks of an *allegiance*. We are to be on the side of Heaven, and not on the side of this present evil world.

### **A Heaven-Bound Man Answers Earth-Bound Men**

In our last message, we began to see that John the Baptist set his mind on things above, and not on the things of this earth. His thinking was synchronized with that of Heaven. His allegiance was to Heaven, not to this world, and not to its false religious leaders and their man-made regulations.

We began to see in John chapter 3 that when the Jewish religious leaders questioned John's authority to call the nation of Israel to a baptism of purification in preparation for the revelation of the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus Christ, John told them that his authority, unlike theirs, was from Heaven. John told them that his allegiance, unlike theirs, was to Heaven.

In our last message, we saw that John gave them an answer that included six vital propositions that governed his ministry as the forerunner of Jesus Christ. Thus far, we have considered three of them.

First of all, in John chapter 3, verse 27, John the Baptist told them that *all truth is from Heaven*. He said "a man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven." The faithful preacher, the faithful witness to the things of God,

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can only speak of the things that have been given to him from Heaven. And that is because Heaven, not this fallen world, is the source of all truth.

Secondly, in verse 32, John the Baptist told the Jewish religious leaders that *Jesus Christ is the faithful witness of the truth from Heaven*. He said that "what He [Jesus] has seen and heard [in Heaven], that He testifies." And John said, verse 34, "He whom God has sent speaks the words of God." We have a faithful witness to the truth of Heaven, and He is God Himself manifest in the flesh, Jesus Christ.

And thirdly, John the Baptist testified that *all men apart from God speak in an earthly way*. All men apart from Christ, all men apart from His Word, speak in a way that is bound by the things of this earth, and the thinking of this earth. He said, chapter 3, verse 31, that "He who comes from above [He who comes from Heaven] is above all; he who is of the earth is earthly and speaks of the earth." That is all that man, apart from God and His Word, *can* speak of. Man, apart from God, man, apart from the faithful witness of Jesus Christ, can do nothing else.

And so, there is a sharp divide between Heavenly spiritual authority and earthly spiritual authority. There is a sharp divide between legitimate authority and illegitimate authority. Legitimate spiritual authority has its origin in Heaven, where the truth resides. Illegitimate spiritual authority has its origin in this world under the curse.

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## **Three Additional Propositions Regarding Truth**

So these are the first three of the six propositions that John the Baptist gives us. These propositions controlled his thinking, these propositions controlled his actions, these propositions made what he said and what he did valid, and vital, because John the Baptist was grounded in the truth of Heaven and not the things of earth.

But there is yet more for us to see in John the Baptist's testimony. As John defended the truth against the falsehoods of the unsaved religious leaders, he gave them the very definition of the truth from Heaven. John declared the power of the truth of Heaven. And John the Baptist also declared that the truth of Heaven demands a response, and that there are only two responses, and there is no middle ground between them.

And so, turn in your Bibles with me, if you are able, to the Gospel of John chapter 3, beginning at verse 27. I want to read these words for you once again, as we take up the last three of the six great propositions that we find in John the Baptist's testimony. The Gospel of John chapter 3, beginning at verse 27:

John answered and said, "A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from Heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ,' but, 'I have been sent before Him.' He who has the bride is the bridegroom; but the friend of the bridegroom, who

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stands and hears him, rejoices greatly because of the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is fulfilled.

"He [Jesus] must increase, but I must decrease. 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. And what He has seen and heard, that He testifies; and no one receives His testimony [that is, the Jewish religious leaders did not receive His testimony; they refused it. Verse 33 – ]. He who has received His testimony has certified that God is true. For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God does not give the Spirit by measure.

"The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; and he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides on him." (John 3:27-36)

### **The Definition Of Truth**

Let us now take note of the fourth proposition that we find in John the Baptist's testimony. We find it in verse 34: "For He whom God has sent speaks the words of God." *Here we have the very definition of truth: truth is "the words of God."* Second Timothy chapter 3 verse 16 tells us that "all Scripture is given by inspiration of God." Literally, all Scripture consists of "the breathed-out words of God."

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In John chapter 6, verse 63, Jesus said "it is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh profits nothing. The words that I speak to you are spirit and they are life." The words of God are infinitely different in their nature from the words of man. The words of God, given by the Holy Spirit, are the truth which gives life, eternal life. The flesh, Jesus said, profits nothing. There is no life to be found in the words of sinful men. And that is because every word of sinful man is tainted with sin, tainted with falsehood. Every word of man on earth, man apart from God, profits nothing because its origin is in this sin-cursed world. The definition of truth is that it is the words of God, because only He is truth.

### **Only The Truth Of Heaven Can Save**

And because that is the definition of truth, and because Heaven is the only source of truth, and because Jesus Christ Himself is the embodiment of truth, John the Baptist gives us yet another proposition concerning the truth. Proposition number five is this: *Only the truth of Heaven can save a sinner from the wrath of God.*

John chapter 3, verse 35: "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand. [Verse 36] He who believes in the Son has everlasting life."

He who believes in the One who is the embodiment of the truth itself has everlasting life. But, verse 36, "He who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him." The wrath of God is now upon, and forever abides upon, the one who refuses to believe the truth of Heaven. Only the truth of Heaven can save a sinner from the wrath of God.

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In First Thessalonians chapter 2, verse 13, the Apostle Paul said that he thanked God for the Thessalonian believers, "because when you received the Word of God, you welcomed it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the Word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe." John the Baptist stated this definition of truth to the Jewish religious leaders. And in the same way, the Apostle Paul and the others, as they went about proclaiming Jesus Christ, proclaimed the truth not as the word of man, not as anything that they had invented. No, they proclaimed that the very definition of truth is the fact that it is the words of God and not the words of men.

And that is why the truth has power. That is why, as Paul said to the Thessalonians, the truth "effectively works in you who believe." And what was the effect of that truth? Paul tells us in First Thessalonians chapter one, verse nine: the effect of the truth of God was, Paul says, that "you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, and to wait for His Son from Heaven, whom He raised from the dead, even Jesus who delivers us from the wrath to come." Only the truth of God can save a sinner from the wrath to come.

### **The Truth Of Heaven Demands A Response**

And this brings us to the final proposition that we find in John the Baptist's testimony. Proposition number six is this: *The truth of Heaven demands a response, and there are only two, and there is no middle ground between them.*

Notice John chapter 3 verse 36 once again: "He who believes in the Son has

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everlasting life; [but] he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him."

Dear friend, this is the most vital statement of truth in all the universe. And this, the most crucial statement of truth in all the universe, concerns you directly. The question is: How have you responded to it?

Here is the truth of God: "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life." Is this your position? He who believes on Christ has eternal life *now*. Eternal life is not merely a matter for the future. The believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, the true believer in the One who is Himself the embodiment of truth – that individual "*has* everlasting life." It is a present condition.

Only having eternal life in Christ – only having your life hidden in the One who is Truth itself – only this, dear Christian friend, will enable you to persevere in this present evil world. And as John the Baptist declares here in John chapter 3, verse 35, Christ is preeminent because the Father loves Him: "The Father loves the Son, and has given all things into His hand." You are in the hands of the preeminent Christ. Nothing can happen to you, apart from His hand. And eternal death has no hold upon you, if you are a Christian, because you are in His hand.

And because this is true, John the Baptist declares, "He must increase, but I must decrease." Jesus Christ must have the preeminence. The authority and position of the Lord Jesus Christ must come to the forefront in our thinking, in our living, in our witness.

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We have no authority apart from Him. We have no position apart from Him. "He must increase, but I must decrease." My flesh, my earthly claims, my earthly prerogatives, my earth-bound perspectives, my earthly things, must fade into insignificance. I must take my refuge from this perishing world in Jesus Christ. "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life."

The Apostle Paul also declares this to us in the opening verses of Colossians chapter three, "If then you were raised with Christ...your life is [now] hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears [in the future, on that great Day], then you also will appear with Him in glory." Your life, your glorious eternal life that is now hidden with Christ in God, will then be on display for all the universe to behold.

You now have spiritual life, and that life is not in the sphere of this earth. It is in the Lord Jesus Christ from Heaven. "Your life is hidden with Christ in God." The word that is translated "hidden" is the Greek word from which we derive the English words "cryptic" or "encrypted." It has to do with something being secret, even though it is in plain sight. And so it is for us.

This is why the psalmist declares, in Psalm 91, "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty." That "secret place" is in the Lord Jesus Christ. The one who dwells in that "secret place," by faith in Jesus Christ, "shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty."

This is the truth of Heaven, dear friend. Your only place of true protection is

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not to be found in this world, in its philosophies, in its religions, in its governments, in its resources. Your only place of true protection is to be found "under the shadow of the Almighty" – in Jesus Christ. And that is why the psalmist can go on to say this, in Psalm 91:

I will say of the Lord, "He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust."

And then, verse seven:

A thousand may fall at your side, and ten thousand at your right hand; but it shall not come near you. Only with your eyes shall you look, and see the reward of the wicked.

And this is the other side of the equation, dear friend: *the reward of the wicked*. "He who believes in the Son has everlasting life; [but] he who does not believe the Son shall not see life, but the wrath of God abides upon him."

Just as the believer in Jesus Christ abides in the place of eternal safety, the shadow of the Almighty, because his life is hidden with Christ in God, so also the unbeliever abides in the place of peril, and God's wrath abides upon him, because the unbeliever remains outside of Christ unless he repents.

This is the truth that is at issue, dear friend. Only belief in Christ's testimony to the truth of Heaven will appropriate salvation from the wrath of God. Only belief in Christ's testimony to the truth of Heaven will deliver you from the reward of the

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wicked. Jesus Christ has brought this truth, unmixed with falsehood, from Heaven to earth. Christ's testimony always agrees with that of the Father. The incarnate Christ knows the truth and is the truth because He came from, and now dwells in, and will come again from, the place of truth, which is Heaven. We must believe that truth. That truth must be in us.

### **How Is It With You?**

And so I must ask you, dear friend: How is it with you? Are you risen with Christ? Have you died to this world? Is your life hidden with Christ in God? When Christ appears again in glory, will you be made manifest with Him? Will all the universe see that you are in Him?

Do you understand that all truth is from Heaven? Do you understand that Jesus Christ is the faithful witness of that truth? Do you understand that men apart from Christ can speak, and do speak, only in earthly perishing terms? Do you understand the definition of truth – that truth consists of the words of God?

How are you responding to the truth? Are you submitting to the truth, or are you running from the truth? Are you declaring the truth by your very life, because it is a life that is hidden with Christ in God, or are you "suppressing the truth in unrighteousness"? Romans chapter one, verse 18 tells us that "the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who *suppress the truth in unrighteousness*, because what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them" (Romans 1:18-19).

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Dear friend, if you are under the wrath of God today because you have not submitted to the truth of Heaven, I urge, I appeal to you, to bow the knee to Christ so that your life may be hidden in Him, and so that you will have the only way of escape from the wrath of God.

*We would be glad to help you better understand the way to eternal life. Please feel free to contact us by phone, via our website, or by mail using the addresses below.*

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