

Series: *Christ Preeminent In You*

Title: "Christ, High and Lifted Up" (Colossians 3:1-4, Isaiah 6:1-8)

Speaker: Dr. Paul M. Elliott

Original Air Date: Week of 8/4/2013

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Let me call your attention once again to the tremendous imperative, the commandment, that we find in Colossians chapter three, beginning at verse one. If you are able as you are listening today, please focus your attention on these words with me in your own Bible – 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)

Let us look to heaven in prayer. Heavenly Father, I pray that You will speak to us now through Your Word, by Your Spirit. Lift up our Savior before us, I pray, and do a work within each of us that will glorify Your great name. I pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

The Conflict Between Earth and Heaven Within Us

Today I want to particularly call your attention to the words at the end of verse one: "Where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God." We are commanded here to "seek those things which are above," and we are told where they are to be found. They are to be found "where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God."

As we have been considering this passage together, we have already seen the reason why we have such an exhortation in the Word of God. In fact, as we shall

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see today and in messages to come, we find such exhortations in various forms throughout the Word of God. The reason is that the Christian individually, and the church as a body of believers, both have a constant tendency to be focused on the things of earth, rather than setting our minds on things above. And so the Word of God constantly reminds us of this tendency, this conflict between the things of heaven and the things of earth, this conflict within ourselves and within the church.

We have seen that only the believer in Christ can have this conflict. That is because only the believer in Christ has two natures at war within him. The unbeliever is at peace with the things of this earth. The unbeliever is at peace with the ways of this world, and the thinking of this world. But the true believer in Christ – the individual who has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit, who has the Holy Spirit living within him – can never again be at peace with this present world. There is a constant warfare within every true believer in Christ between the flesh and the Spirit. It is the warfare between the things of earth, and the things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God the Father.

And so beginning today, I want to call your attention to various passages in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, in which we see this in various ways. We see God constantly calling His people to set their minds on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God, and to divorce our way of thinking and our way of living from the things of earth which are perishing.

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Isaiah in the Throne Room of Heaven

The first of many passages I want to call to your attention is the account of Isaiah chapter six. Here we find Isaiah taken into the very throne room of heaven, as God calls Isaiah to do a tremendous and eternal work for Him.

Turn with me, please, if you are able, to Isaiah chapter six, and follow with me as I read, beginning at verse one. Isaiah chapter six, beginning at verse one:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke.

So I said: "Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

Then one of the seraphim flew to me, having in his hand a live coal which he had taken with the tongs from the altar. And he touched my

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mouth with it, and said: "Behold, this has touched your lips; your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged."

Also I heard the voice of the Lord, saying: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Then I said, "Here am I! Send me." (Isaiah 6:1-8)

God's Way of Preparing Isaiah

Note that this account takes place "in the year that King Uzziah died." Isaiah prophesied during the time of four kings of Judah – Uzziah, his son Jotham, his son Ahaz, and his son Hezekiah. Great events were going to take place during Isaiah's lifetime, and Isaiah would be directly involved in them.

There was a time of great revival and reformation under Hezekiah, but there was also a time of great paganism and idolatry under Ahaz. During the time of Hezekiah, the nation was nearly destroyed. And during all of Isaiah's time, the kingdom never completely forsook pagan idolatry, even in the best of times, even in a time of great revival.

And in the verses immediately after the ones we have just read, God tells Isaiah that in his own time much of his proclamation as the spokesman for God would fall on deaf ears. The Lord told Isaiah that this would continue until God would finally send Judah off into captivity because of the people's stiff-necked refusal to obey God consistently. But here in the verses we have just read, God prepares Isaiah to do a great work – a great work not merely for Isaiah's own

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generation, not merely for the few generations remaining before Judah would go into captivity. God was giving Isaiah a work to do that would have eternal consequences.

Dear friend, do you think about the fact that God gives each of His people a work to do that will have eternal consequences – heavenly consequences? It is God's desire and plan to use His people as His instruments in saving others for eternity. It is God's desire and plan to use His people as His instruments to build up a people in the faith, so that they will be prepared for eternity. Isaiah lived in a time of great crisis and tumult on earth, but in order for Isaiah to do the work that God had called him to do, God first of all focused Isaiah's attention on things above.

And God did so in a remarkable way. God brought Isaiah into the very throne room of heaven. God showed Isaiah His majesty and His holiness. God showed Isaiah the heavenly beings who serve Him at His throne.

"Holy, Holy, Holy"

But above all, God showed Isaiah His holiness. Notice again the words:

In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to

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another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" (Isaiah 6:1-3)

Dear friend, are you setting your mind on things above, so that you have this understanding of the holiness of God? Do you understand who this God is – the One who dwells in inapproachable light (1 Timothy 6:16)? Do you understand that this holy God is a consuming fire (Exodus 24:17; Deuteronomy 4:24, 9:3; Hebrews 12:29)? Do you understand that because God is utterly holy, therefore fellowship with the holy God demands holiness on the part of those who would approach Him?

God says repeatedly, "Be holy, for I am holy" (e.g., Leviticus 11:44-45, 19:2, 20:7; Matthew 5:48; 1 Peter 1:15-16). Do you understand that God's holiness is absolutely inviolable? Do you understand that He cannot for one moment condone sin or have any relationship with it (Psalm 11:4-6, Habakkuk 1:13)?

Do you understand that Genesis chapter two tells us that our first parents, in their un-fallen, holy state, enjoyed unbroken fellowship with God? Do you understand the consequences of their sin, their disobedience? Do you understand that their disobedience – not merely the *act* of disobedience, but the *attitude* of rebellion against God that led to it – do you understand that their disobedience broke that fellowship for themselves and introduced sin and its effects into the creation (Genesis 3:16-19; Isaiah 59:2; Romans 5:12 & 18, 8:20-22)? Do you understand that because of their sin, they and all mankind became the objects of

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God's holy wrath (Romans 1:18, 2:5; Ephesians 2:3)?

Do you understand God's holy anger with sin? "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory!" Do you understand that there is no place in heaven or earth where you can go to escape God's glory and God's holiness? Do you understand that there is no dark and secret corner of your mind and heart that is not naked and open before the holiness of God? Do you understand that you cannot go into some dark corner or some secret place, mentally or physically, and disobey God without that disobedience being naked and open before Him? Hebrews 4:13 tells us that "all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" – the holy God.

Do you understand these things, dear friend? Do you understand that God is not the God of therapy for sin, but of judgment against sin? Do you understand that it is not merely a matter of *sins* – the acts that you commit and the thoughts that you think – but a matter of *sin*, a matter of a *disobedient heart*, the fact that apart from Jesus Christ you and every other human being is an enemy of God, in rebellion against His holiness?

The Only Way to Understand God's Holiness

Dear friend, you can only have this understanding as you set your mind upon things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. You will not understand these things by setting your mind on the things of this earth.

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Only when you set your mind on things above can you truly understand that the wrath of God – His anger against sin – is essential to His holy nature. It is not a mere emotional matter. The holy wrath of God is His righteous and perfect indignation against anything or anyone who violates His holiness. God is not indifferent to the poison of sin that has thoroughly polluted the perfect universe He created. More than twenty Hebrew words refer to the wrath of God in the Old Testament, and those words are used over 580 times.

And the wrath of God is not merely an Old Testament concept. Many commentators want to say that the God of the Old Testament is the God of wrath, but the God of the New Testament is the God of love. Dear friend, Scripture knows no such distinction. Jeremiah tells us that the God of the Old Testament is the God of "everlasting love" (31:3). But the New Testament also tells us repeatedly that God is the God of holy wrath against sin.

Look at Jesus' teachings on God's wrath in the Gospels. Look at Paul's great exposition of the doctrine of justification by faith alone – deliverance from the wrath of God – in Romans. Look at the Holy Spirit's explanation of Christ's propitiation of the wrath of God by His own blood in Hebrews. Look at the great and terrible judgments that are prophesied in Revelation. "The wrath of God," Paul tells us in Romans chapter one, "is revealed against all unrighteousness and ungodliness of men" – all without exception (Romans 1:18).

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You Can Only Be God's Child If You Understand His Holiness

Dear friend, as you set your mind on things above, the very first question you must ask is this: Am I safe from the wrath of God? And only when you set your mind on things above can you understand that "where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God," you will find the only remedy for your sin, the only propitiation for sin, the only thing and the only One who will take away the wrath of God against you – and that is the blood of Christ on the heavenly altar, and Jesus Christ the righteous interceding for sinners who come to Him not seeking to do anything for themselves, but seeking by faith alone to appropriate what He has done for them.

Dear friend, many passages in the Bible tell us that the holy wrath of God remains, and will eternally remain, upon those who persist in unbelief apart from Christ (John 3:36, Ephesians 5:6, Colossians 3:6, Revelation 20:11-15, 21:8). But those who place their faith in Christ alone, apart from works (Romans 3:28), are, Romans chapter five verse nine tells us, "justified by His blood... [and] saved from wrath through Him."

You Can Only Do God's Work If You Understand His Holiness

The prophet Isaiah had this understanding of things above. When he saw the glory of God and the holiness of God seated on His throne, Isaiah cried out, "Woe is me, for I am undone [in the Hebrew, I am cut off, I am destroyed]; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5).

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Isaiah saw the pre-incarnate Lord Jesus Christ, "the King, the Lord of hosts." And later in his prophecy, in chapter thirty-three, Isaiah will ask, "Who among us shall dwell with the devouring fire? Who among us shall dwell with the everlasting burnings?" (33:14). God drove this great reality home to Isaiah by showing him the throne room of heaven.

Listen again to the cry of Isaiah: "Woe is me, for I am undone [in the Hebrew, I am cut off, I am destroyed]; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts."

God showed Isaiah His absolute holiness. And God showed Isaiah *his* hopeless depravity. And God showed Isaiah that there was no hope to be found in the things of earth. "I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." There is no help, no salvation, to be found there. But God showed Isaiah Himself, "high and lifted up," seated on the throne of heaven. And God saved Isaiah, and God set Isaiah apart to do a work for His glory. And when God said, "Whom shall I send, and who will go for Us?" Isaiah said without hesitation, "Here am I! Send me." Isaiah was ready to do God's work.

Isaiah's Work for the God of Heaven

What was that work? Let me just briefly describe it for you. As I said earlier, Isaiah prophesied during the reigns of four kings. Isaiah prophesied against great evil – he prophesied against a king of Judah who sacrificed his own children to pagan gods. Isaiah also participated in a time of great revival and reformation.

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Isaiah was also instrumental in saving the nation of Judah from judgment for a time. We read in 2 Chronicles chapter 32 that Sennacherib king of Assyria invaded Judah in the time of king Hezekiah. And Sennacherib laid siege to Jerusalem. And he boasted to the people of Judah that no other god had been able to stand against him. Sennacherib had conquered all other nations he had invaded. And so he said to the people of Judah, "Your God cannot deliver you out of my hand."

But we read in 2 Chronicles 32:20 that Hezekiah the king and Isaiah the prophet "prayed and cried out to heaven" for the nation's deliverance. And Hezekiah under the influence of Isaiah said to the people, "Be strong and courageous; do not be afraid nor dismayed before the king of Assyria, nor before all the multitude that is with him; for there are more with us than with him" (2 Chronicles 32:7). Because of Isaiah the prophet, Hezekiah also set his mind on the things of heaven, and not on the things of earth. He understood that deliverance would come from heaven, and it did. This is what we find, in 2 Chronicles chapter 32, beginning at verse 20:

Now because of this King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah, the son of Amoz, prayed and cried out to heaven. Then the Lord sent an angel who cut down every mighty man of valor, leader, and captain in the camp of the king of Assyria. So he returned shamefaced to his own land. And when he had gone into the temple of his god, some of his own offspring struck him down with the sword there. Thus the Lord

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saved Hezekiah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem from the hand of Sennacherib the king of Assyria, and from the hand of all others, and guided them on every side. (2 Chronicles 32:20-22)

And furthermore, we find God using Isaiah to write the great book of prophecy that we find in the Old Testament, with all of its great statements concerning the first and second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ, including the great and vital statement of the virgin birth of Christ, and the great prophecy of Christ's sufferings to justify sinners in Isaiah chapter 53. Isaiah continued to set his mind on things above, and not on things on the earth.

When God opened Isaiah's eyes to behold the throne room of heaven, God was preparing Isaiah to do a great work, not merely in his own time, but for eternity. Isaiah could not see this clearly. Seven hundred years later, Peter wrote this in his first epistle, chapter one, beginning at verse seven:

Of this salvation the prophets [Isaiah and the others] have inquired and searched carefully, who prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow.

To them it was revealed that, not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through

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those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven—things which angels desire to look into. (1 Peter 1:10-12)

When God sent Philip to the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts chapter eight, what was the eunuch reading as he traveled home from Jerusalem? He was reading the prophecy of Isaiah. And we read in Acts chapter 8 verse 35 that

Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture [Isaiah chapter 53, Philip], preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, "See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?" Then Philip said, "If you believe with all your heart, you may." And he answered and said, "I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God." (Acts 8:35-37)

Dear friend, set your mind on things above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. And as you do so, God will use you. God will work in you. We find this in the rest of the book of Colossians as Paul exhorts us to have this heaven-bound focus in every aspect of our life in this world.

You may not see all of the results, just as Isaiah did not see all of the results. In the sovereign working of God, some may accept your witness, and others will reject your witness. But as you maintain this heaven-bound focus, dear friend, God will use your life to accomplish His sovereign purposes – not only in the present time, but in years to come, perhaps even in generations to come, and for eternity.

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This was true for Isaiah, as God opened his eyes to see "the Lord, high and lifted up." And it will be true for you, by the powerful working of Jesus Christ, the One who is and must be "high and lifted up" in our own lives.

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