

# Coming in First Place ~ the preeminence of Jesus Christ

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## Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 3:1-4

*The Christian's Expectation – What Is It?*

**1 Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. 3 For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.**

In the 1960s a teacher was given a roster showing the actual I.Q. test scores of the students of one class, and for another class a roster in which the I.Q. column had been (mistakenly) filled in with the students' locker numbers. The teacher assumed that the locker numbers were the actual I.Q.s of the students when the rosters were posted at the beginning of the semester.

After a year it was discovered that in the first class the students with high actual I.Q. scores had performed better than those with low ones. But in the second class the students with higher locker numbers scored significantly higher than those with lower locker numbers!

Why, what made the students in the second class, whose I.Q.s may have been much lower in some cases, actually excel? It was the teacher's expectation. The teacher expected better things from these students and so they rose to the occasion. Whereas those in that second class who might have had high I.Q.s but low locker numbers had little expectations upon them and therefore did not perform as they ought.

*The Christian has and ought to live in light of expectations.* While we don't always like the thought of living up to the expectation of others, partly because others tend to expect far more than we can often deliver, there is at least One who has expectations of us and for Whom we ought to rise to the occasion and that is our God. And because our God has expectation of us as His children, as His redeemed and as His ambassadors to this world, we can and ought also to have high expectations upon one another; not for others to do things that we ourselves will not do; but that we all might excel to all that God wants us to be as those who have been saved by Him.

As we come to Colossians 3, we come to a great transition in the book. As many of you know, the Apostle Paul loves dividing his letters into two main divisions; the first being doctrine and the second being duty; the first being the principles and the second being the practice. We see this in the letter to the Romans, where the first eleven chapters are chalk full of the doctrine of salvation and of how a man is made right with God by the work of Jesus Christ. Then, beginning in Romans 12, Paul shifts from this doctrinal approach and shifts to our duties in light of that doctrine saying in verse 1:

***Therefore I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.***

In other words, in light of the things taught in the previous chapter, this is the how you should live. And in Romans 12-15 we find this practical teaching. You find this patten in the letter to the Ephesians where chapters 1-3 are highly doctrinal, teaching deep truths about God, Jesus,

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man and salvation and then beginning with chapter 4, the shift is to what this doctrine means for everyday life as Paul wrote in verse 1,

***Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called...***

And now, in keeping with this pattern, we come to Colossians 3 having just concluded in the first two chapters doctrinal truths concerning the person of Jesus Christ, specifically of His sufficiency as our only Savior as well as of His supremacy as Sovereign God. Beginning in Colossians 3:1 we find the transitional word, ***"Therefore..."*** – in light of the doctrine concerning Christ; in light of all you have learned about Christ alone for salvation; this then is how you ought to live. And proceeding from 3:1 all the way through to 4:6, we have this very practical approach to Christian living. We have, in fact, what I have called ***"The Christian Expectation"*** – that is, what should the Christian expect both of himself and of God in light of who Jesus Christ is? How should the sufficiency of Jesus and the supremacy of Jesus affect your everyday life? Does God expect anything from the person who has yielded his life to Jesus? Of course He does; and of course every believer ought to rise to the level of God's expectations upon him (1 Peter 1:13-16). In Christ, whether you have a high I.Q. or just a high locker number; you ought to do well in the schoolroom of Christ; which is where every believer in Christ finds himself. And what follows in the great remainder of this book, are God's expectations, very doable; very livable; very wonderful expectations by which we ought to live; ***and***, better yet, the very steps by which we may live out those expectations! In Colossians 3:1-4 we have these expectations of God upon those who believe and in Colossians 3:5-4:6 we have the steps, the very means by which we can live up to these expectations.

So this morning, we will begin looking at what are these expectations that God has upon we who believe. The first expectation is the core, it lays the very ground work of the other expectations. In light of all we have seen, namely that Jesus Christ is both the Savior and the Sovereign, the Redeemer and the Ruler; the Lover of our Souls as well as the Lord of our lives; what then should be our response? How then shall we live? In Colossians 3:1-4, there are three expectations we may delightfully live out to the glory of God; the first one of which we study this morning being...

## **Expectation #1 – Do you live in the reality of Christ's resurrection? (3:1a)**

*Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ...*

As Paul begins this portion of his letter to the Colossians, it is like he is taking them and therefore us into the very bank of heaven. In this opening statement we find one of the most superlative statements of Scripture; that is the limitless treasures of Christ, "in whom" according to Colossians 2:3, ***"are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge"***; or, in other words, in whom every spiritual blessing is ours in Him; beginning with resurrection life. When Paul writes, ***"Therefore, if you have been raised up with Christ..."*** it is like he is saying, "Help yourself to Jesus! Everything He has is yours! All that He is, He is for you!"

Remember that Paul had been dealing with the nature of cults; those groups of people or individual teachers that would say in effect, "Christ is not enough." Christ is good, but you need something else. In Colossians 2:8-23, Paul has told us in most emphatic form that Christianity is not Christ plus intellectualism; it is not Christ and some nebulous, subjective experience; it is not

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Christ and the worshipping of angels, or the keeping of man-made rules; it is not Christ and the performing of some feats of radical self-denial. No, the Christian life is simple and it is this - it is a "shared" life – a life that Jesus shares with us. The expectation that God has upon the believer and the believer ought to have upon God is that the he, because of the work of God in salvation, shares in and with the all-victorious; risen; and ascended to right hand of God Christ by means of the indwelling Spirit of God. Christianity is living in the reality of the resurrected Christ. It is to live every moment with the attitude revealed in the words of Christ in John 14:19 where He said, **"because I live, you will live also."**

The truth presented in the opening words of verse one are indeed glorious; they are indeed lofty; and they are even in some ways majestically mysterious; yet they are not like the counterfeit mysteries of the cults. They do not add to Christ; this mystery or miracle of resurrection exalts Christ. And so, our text sets before us truth that while is astoundingly glorious; it is also genuine and intensely practical. In other words, what Paul is getting after is that the reality of the resurrection is to have daily implications. You ought to expect this if you are a believer in Christ. In this statement we learn that Christianity is not some "head in the clouds" disconnect from reality kind of life. For while every believer is indeed "in Christ", and may contemplate the all the heavenly treasures we possess in Christ, Paul knew as well that every believer he was writing to in this letter was also "at Colossae" (1:2); that is they lived in the real world, surrounded by real problems; sickness; disappointments, scandals; divisions and the like. And so, to live in the reality of the resurrection is not a means by which we ignore what is going on around, but rather a means by which to live above the problems of this world. We are in the world, but we are not of the world. The temptations of sin, to give up, to give in, or even to forsake all that Christ is, if even in just for a moment; attack us from both within and from without. But the answer to all this is Christ and living in light of His being raised from the dead.

Let us be careful that when we seek to live in the power of the resurrection, that while such a statement is somewhat mystical; it is by no means mythical. There is a real power available to every believer in Christ to live in a manner uncommon; to live in the power of the Spirit of God who raised Jesus from the dead. To live in the power of the resurrection of Christ is a fact for the believer and is every bit as true as birth and death, of health and sickness, of wealth and poverty and even of freedom and imprisonment. While these are physical facts, the power of the resurrection is a spiritual fact, every bit as real; and every bit as reliable as other facts.

And so, if we fail to live in light of the resurrection of Jesus; according to the very power of God that raised Jesus from the dead; who died for our sins so that we might live for God; we will be left wanting; we will be left with needing to add something to our lives to make ourselves feel better; to feel closer to God; but it will not work and it is not biblical; for in Jesus all the fullness of the deity dwells in bodily form and in Him and Him alone you have been made, once and for all, complete; full; finished.

So let me ask you; do you seek to live in the reality of Christ's resurrection? I guess if we are to honestly answer that, we need to make sure that we understand what are the facts of the resurrection. Let me share at least three.

**First**, the resurrection of Christ is a fact of sacred history. Just as we know that Pearl Harbor was bombed December 7, 1941; or the World Trade Center Towers came crashing down on September 11, 2001; let us know that just as surely Christ expired on the cross. When Jesus died on the cross, His body was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea. The disciples were in hiding in fear for their lives. One of their number, Judas, had committed suicide. Peter, their

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leader had discredited himself by his denials and cursings of Christ. John had been entrusted by Jesus to care for Mary, His mother and therefore took her to his home. And even later, we find those two on the road to Emmaus, who were convinced that all their hopes and dreams of God's salvation had expired on the cross.

But as surely as Christ expired on the cross; as truly as Jesus Himself foretold of His crucifixion; so He also foretold of His resurrection. And exactly on time, after three days and three nights, Jesus rose from the dead. And now, whether people like it or not; whether they choose to ignore it or not, all of history rings with the words, “He is risen!” The resurrection of Christ is a fact of sacred history.

**Second**, the resurrection of Christ is a fact of sound theology. If Colossians 3:1a be true, then Christ must certainly be raised from the dead; for if Christ has not been raised, then we cannot be raised with Him. This is what 1 Corinthians 15:17 declares:

***and if Christ has not been raised, (if this is not an historical fact; then we have a theological problem) your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.***

Without the resurrection of Christ, there is no faith and there is no forgiveness of sins. Everything we know about needing to be saved from our sin is wrapped up in the resurrection; this then is sound theology; for Jesus rose from the dead. Multiple times different people and groups saw Him after He rose. Four times in 1 Corinthians 15:5-8 Paul says, “He appeared...!” (repeat). Jesus was seen by His followers; by His family and even by His foe, the apostle Paul himself on the road to Damascus. The resurrection of Christ is a fact of sound theology.

**Third**, the resurrection of Christ is a fact of spiritual victory. Paul links the believer's ability to daily live for and love Jesus with His resurrection; ***“Therefore, if you have been raised with Christ...”*** If you have and then continue to experience the power that raised Jesus from the dead...! The truth is that Christ is raised from the dead and so, if we are in Christ, we too, who have been made complete in Jesus, are also raised with Christ. Let me say it this way, our union with Christ by faith is so sure, and so complete that we actually stand with Him on the resurrection side of the grave. When our brother John went home to be with the Lord on June 10, he did not remain unconscious; unaware of his existence; no; to be absent from the body, declares the word of God, it to be present, at home with the Lord. To be sure, John's physical body remains asleep, awaiting bodily resurrection, but John's faith in the promise of God has him presently in God's presence, on the resurrection side of the grave. Beloved, we may sometimes not feel this to be so, but God declares it to be a fact; believers are raised with Christ and to live in light of that – it is to affect everything we do; how we live our lives; how we love our spouses; how we raise our children; how we perform at work; how we submit to our parents; how we relate to our neighbors and so on and so forth.

This truth of living in the reality of the resurrection is so important that I would like to illustrate it with Scripture by turning to John 12 and seeing all this pictured for us in the home of three siblings, Mary, Martha and Lazarus. In these three we find that living in the reality of the resurrection impacts our working, our worshipping and our witnessing. Let us see this. In John 11 Lazarus had been raised from the dead, gloriously, wonderfully, miraculously brought back to life (I know I am skipping over a wonderful story there, but this is where we must begin for sake of time). Then, beginning in John 12:1-2 we read:

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**1 Jesus, therefore, six days before the Passover, came to Bethany where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they made Him a supper there, and Martha was serving...**

Notice that **“Martha was serving...”** Martha was working. Do you remember what happened the time before this when we read the Scriptures that Martha was serving? In Luke 10:40 we read about it:

**But Martha was distracted with all her preparations; and she came up to Him and said, "Lord, do You not care that my sister has left me to do all the serving alone? Then tell her to help me."**

Here Martha had a critical spirit. Her concern was on herself; how things affected her. But now, in John 12:2, that spirit was gone and her preoccupation with self was erased. She quietly ministered to Jesus and His disciples and did not worry about Mary's roles. Why the difference between these two episodes? Martha was living in the reality that Jesus was the resurrection and life; she was living in light of that and it gave her joy. Do you find joy in serving the Lord? It is not to be about what others are or are not doing that causes you joy; but rather, are you doing what you know Jesus would have you do with gladness; because you are sharing in His life; in the power of the resurrection? Martha was sharing in the resurrection of Lazarus; which was only a foretaste of the greater resurrection of Jesus to come. Beloved, do you believe and live in the power of the resurrection? Do you believe in its power to save; to change, to raise you up, even every day; to live in the joy of such a thought. Is this not summarize in the words of Romans 10:9-10

**9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation.**

Is this not the most joyful of realities; the most joyful of thoughts? Let us pray that we would live our lives in such a way as to express this truth even in our working.

So then, we find that the reality of the resurrection affected Martha's working, but notice as well that it also affected Mary's worshipping. We read in John 12:3

**Mary then took a pound of very costly perfume of pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped His feet with her hair; and the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.**

As a result of seeing Jesus as the resurrection and the life, Mary performed a most extravagant act of worship. Before Lazarus' death, Mary was an emotional wreck, a victim of uncontrolled grief, and now, with calm, trust and devotion, she worships the Lord of resurrection, pouring out upon Jesus “very costly perfume and pure nard” – worth at least one year's wages; all in one single act. Can you imagine being so moved by the thought of the power of the resurrection that nothing is too costly to devote to the Lord; even a year's worth of your wages!

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How could she do this? Of course this was the concern of Judas who saw this extravagant worship as a waste.

All of this made me think; when was the last time that I was truly extravagant in my worship; that I made an offering that was of such value that it caused others to take notice. Remember King David in 2 Samuel 24:24, when wanting to worship the Lord, was freely offered everything he needed by a man named Araunah. What was David's response? He said, **“.../ will not offer burnt offerings to the LORD my God which cost me nothing.”** David wanted to be extravagant. Mary wanted to be extravagant! And both David and Mary knew something about the resurrection power of Christ even though it had not been finalized, they each, respectively had experienced it. I find it interesting that this Mary never did go to see Jesus on the cross or at the tomb. Perhaps she had progressed beyond such a need because she knew that the Lord who could raise her brother from the dead, would certainly keep His promise to rise again. In her heart, she had already been raised with Christ by the truth of the resurrection; and this truth affected her worship.

How extravagant is your worship? Do you live in the reality of the resurrection when you worship? Does it affect your worship?

**Finally**, we find that the reality of the resurrection impacted **Lazarus' witnessing**. I can't imagine that anyone who entered into that home that day was not profoundly affected. And we know that many did come as we read in John 12:9:

***The large crowd of the Jews then learned that He was there; and they came, not for Jesus' sake only, but that they might also see Lazarus, whom He raised from the dead.***

No one had experienced the power of the resurrection quite like Lazarus! Now, we need to think about this; that the people did not come to see Lazarus because he was a fine man, or because he was a friend of Jesus or even because he followed Jesus. Such things didn't impress the people. What impressed the people was to see a man who was living because of the power of the resurrection. In fact, one man living in the power of the resurrection was so profound that we read in John 12:10 that the religious leaders were plotting to put him to death. Of course Jesus could have just raised him again. But the point is this, that a person living in the power of the resurrection is, by his life, a witness of the Lord of resurrection, Jesus Christ.

What does all this mean for us? Colossians 3:1 read, ***“Therefore, if we have been raised with Christ...”*** The “if” here in the Greek is not a question, but a statement of fact and can rightly be translated “since” – this is the reality friends, “Since we have been raised with Christ...” It is that God has put us where Jesus had put Lazarus, on the resurrection side of the grave. Of course, it is even better for us, for when we are completely raised with Christ, we will never die again; Lazarus, poor unfortunate soul; actually had to die twice! Beloved, in Christ, we are put beyond the reach of penalty and power of sin and death forever. Therefore, wherever we live, wherever we work; wherever we worship, should be places where the spiritually dead meet those who are now spiritually alive, living on resurrection ground.

In Romans 6:11 we are told, ***“Even so consider yourselves to be dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus.”*** In light of the resurrection of Jesus, we are to count, to reckon, to consider ourselves dead to sin, but alive to God because we are “in Christ Jesus” all because of what Romans 6:4 declares:

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***Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life.***

To walk in “***newness of life***” is to walk in the reality, in the power of the resurrection; it is to be raised with Christ. Now then, we need to close, but let me give you just a few practical ways in which to experience living in the power of the resurrection rather than in the powerlessness of human circumstance; of how to live up to God’s expectation of resurrection life rather than according to the victim mentality of this earth. Even in these few examples, I promise you, you will not be able to do; or at least do with joy, apart from purposely calling upon the Lord to empower you with the reality of the resurrection for such a work:

- When you are lonely, feeling left out or cut off; who do you stop to call to make sure he or she is not feeling the same way?
- When you are busy beyond belief; who do you stop to help in their busyness?
- When you are overwhelmed by the circumstances of life; who do you stop to encourage; lifting their head up out of the water?

Is this not the very teaching and the very attitude of Jesus expressed in Philippians 2:3-11 where we read:

***3 Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, although He existed in the form of God, did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, 7 but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. 8 Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. 9 For this reason also, God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, 10 so that at the name of Jesus EVERY KNEE WILL BOW, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and that every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.***

Beloved, “***since we have been raised with Christ...***” let us pray that we, by God’s grace, live up to that expectation to the glory of God knowing that living in this manner will also cause us the greatest joy and benefit.

*Soli Deo Gloria*

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