

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians

Colossians 3:1-4

The Christian's Expectation – What Is It? (Part 2)

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.

Last week we began Colossians 3 by noting from our text that God indeed has expectations upon us as His children. As those who have been saved by the blood of Jesus Christ, as those who are redeemed off the slave market of sin; as those who now are Christ's witnesses and ambassadors; what are the expectations that God has upon us. What is our position in Jesus Christ that ought to also affect our practice? Some of these expectations would include things like being holy even as He is holy; of walking or living in a manner worthy of our calling; and of being witnesses for Jesus Christ; just to name. So let me remind you again, that being a Christian, by professing that you are born again means that you have and ought to live in light of the expectations that God has placed upon you. These expectations, and they are many and varied, ought not to be seen as some dreadful duty, but rather as an utter delight.

Expectation #1 – Do you live in the reality of Christ's resurrection?

From our text in Colossians 3:1-4, I submit to you that there are at least three such expectations, the first of which was our study last week, the expectation to live in the reality of the resurrection. When we read in our text, **Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ...**, we are immediately confronted with the pivotal truth of Christianity, that is the power of God that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power by which God raises us up from death to life, from darkness to light from being powerless to either save ourselves or please God to being saved by grace unto salvation and empowered by grace to live for God. In very real terms, every moment we live, every word we say, every action we perform is now to be lived in light of the resurrection of Jesus because, if we are in Christ, we have been raised up with Him.

And the question we must ask ourselves daily is this; how ought the resurrection of Jesus Christ, the reality of this event as well as the result of this event in my life, affect my everyday actions and attitudes? If I am a Christian does the resurrection of Christ impact my life? It is to do so and we need to be making continual strides and adjustments in our lives, according to the Word of God, by the working of the Spirit of God; to live to the glory of God and to the exaltation of Jesus Christ. Or to put it all into the terms of Paul, that Jesus would come to have first place in everything; in the living of my life, the execution of my job, the experience of my marriage, the raising of my children, the enjoyment of my hobbies; to what I think about in worship of God and the hearing of His word, indeed in everything I have been granted the privilege of living my life; not according to my strength, or in my power, or according to the rules and whims of this world system, but rather in resurrection power; that is by grace; or by walking in the Spirit of God.

Let me make one other comment on this. At the end of last week's message, I gave a short list of practical suggestions by which we might practice living in the reality of the resurrection. That list was:

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

- 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?

We might look at such a list and think to ourselves in terms of the past; thinking that we have not done a good job of doing such things. Fret not I say to you; for the question is not what have or haven't you done, but rather, will you today, right now live in the reality of the resurrection of Christ; knowing that because He lives, you live; and because He served others unselfishly, you can, because you have been raised up with Him, unselfishly serve others to His glory? Let us now consider the second expectation we find in our text.

Expectation #2 – Do you live in the reality of Christ's rapture? (3:1b-3)

...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.

After considering that Jesus was raised from the dead according to the first part of verse 1, we are immediately presented with another glorious truth, that Jesus, God in the flesh, truly God, yet also truly, bodily and physically man, has ascended on high and in the place of highest honor, **“at the right hand of God”**. Beloved, Jesus is in the position of absolute power and because of that we can know that He intends to make good on all of His promises and that we can enjoy all the fruits of His victory.

Just think about what we know about what happened to Jesus Christ from the cross to the ascension. Of course, Jesus was crucified and died, buried and then raised on the third day. Jesus walked publically among not only the disciples, but also among a group of 500 people. He was in various towns, in the country, along the seashore. For forty days Jesus presented Himself and it all culminated with a walk to the Mount of Olives where Jesus gave some final instructions; ultimately to wait for the coming Holy Spirit.

Then, upon the top of that mountain, Jesus lifted up His hands and stepped into the sky. According to Acts 1, the disciples just gazed intently watching Jesus go up, up, up and out of sight. Where was He going? He was headed home beloved. Past the pearly gates of the Celestial City, heading to the great throne room of Almighty God. And for the first time ever a human being, this nail-scarred yet resurrected body of the God-man did something no other human had ever done in God's presence; He sat down; not just anywhere; but at the right hand of God, the place of prestige and power.

In Light of the Raptured Christ, Keep Seeking Things Above

And here is the truth that we must glean from Colossians 3:1 – this is where Jesus still is today; the resurrected and raptured Savior and Sovereign. Jesus is in the presence of God. And now we read in our text that if we are raised with Christ, we are to “live” in light of the raptured Christ. When we read, **“keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right**

† Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

hand of God... This beloved is our continual invitation to live in light of and in the reality of where Christ is, in the presence of God ready to bless. Every blessing, every bliss, every purity; every conception of holiness; it is to our desire and delight to live in light of such things.

This is an abundant and continual provision. Here is the expectation: **“Keep seeking”** – a present active verb, meaning, keep on and never stop seeking. The word for seeking means to endeavor, to plan, to plot, to devise every conceivable means by which to accomplish the task. If you have been raised with Christ, then the expectation upon you is to live even as Christ currently lives, in the presence of God, with eyes upon Him; with every devotion upon Him.

I know this will be hard to see, but I present an artist’s conception of Bunyan’s sad character of the man with a muck rake in his hand. Based upon Bunyan’s description, we find a man old, bent, careworn and grey. He is stooped over with a rake in his hand. His sole concern is with his rake and what he can turn up from the muck. Bunyan tells us how Christiana and her children came to the Interpreter’s House, and were taken by the master of it into one of his Significant Rooms. In one of these there was a man that could look no way but downwards, with a muck-rake in his hand; there stood also one over his head, with a celestial crown in his hand, and proffered him that crown for his muck-rake; but the man did neither look up nor regard, but raked to himself the straws, the small sticks, and dust of the floor.

Allow me to read a bit more from Pilgrim’s Progress: *Then said Christiana (to the Interpreter), I persuade myself that I know somewhat the meaning of this; for this is a figure of a man of this world: is it not, good Sir?*

Thou hast said the right, said he; and his muck-rake doth show his carnal mind. And whereas thou seest him rather give heed to rake up straws and sticks, and the dust of the floor, than to do what he says that calls to him from above, with the celestial crown in his hand, it is to show that Heaven is but as a fable to some, and that things here are counted the only things substantial. Now, whereas it was also shewed thee that the man could look no way but downwards, it is to let thee know, that earthly things, when they are with power upon men’s minds, quite carry their hearts away from God. Then said Christiana, O deliver me from this muck-rake!

When we learn of our position as being those who have been raised with Christ, delivered from the body of this death and from the vain and hell-damning pursuits of this world; the expectation then is, seek the things above where Christ is. And because we are so prone to look below, we ought to cry with Christiana, “O deliver me from this muck-rake!”



† Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

Are you content with looking at thing below? We have so many pressures to look anywhere but up to Christ and to that crown of life. As one writer put it, "The psychologist says to all such, "Look within." The opportunist says, "Look around." The optimist says, "Look ahead." The pessimist says, "Look out!" But God says to you and to me, to all who are raised with Christ, "Look up!" When you saddened by the turn of events in this life, "Look up!" When you receive the accolades of family and friends, "Look up!" When you come to end of yourself, "Look up!" When you are riding on wings of the winds, "Look up!" In everything, good or bad, easy or difficult, simple or complex, there is never to be a moment that goes by where you are not looking up at all the blessings and benefits that are yours because you have been raised with Christ. This is God's expectation upon you and it is a blessed expectation. The only question is this, will you practice it?

In Light of the Raptured Christ, Set Your Mind on Things Above

But our text goes on; Paul is not content to simply say, ***"keep seeking"***. So, not only do we have this expectation to live in the reality of Christ rapture by continually seeking the things that are ours because of Christ place in heaven, but our text goes on to say that we also have the expectation to set our minds upon something, or rather Someone. We read in verse 2, ***"Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth."*** Again I would have you note that this is a command, an expectation of God. Again it is in the present tense, meaning it to be our continual action; and additionally, while I did not mention this about the seeking, both this seeking and this setting are plural verbs, something that each and every one of us is to practice together. The beauty of this is that we are to not only seek these thing individually, but also then seek out these things for one another.

Here then we are told to ***"set our minds on the things above."*** The verb translated "set our mind" means to be purposely intent on something. In short, we are being told to change our point of view, to be looking at things differently than from a worldly view point. Sometimes we simply need to stop and look at things differently. And here, the different view point is heavenward. Why do we need to constantly be looking at things from a heavenly perspective? Because, when we get our minds focused upon the things, the cares, and the worries of this earth, they will consume us and the sad thing is, in the end, all the cares, all the worries, all the earthly pursuits will amount to nothing but regrets and a horrible waste of time.

We have an example of this contrast between the those of worldly pursuits versus those of godly ones in the book of Genesis. Does anyone know what we find in Genesis 4? In Genesis 4, we have in essence a list of names of those whose eyes had been upon this earth. This list is a whose who of the world's worthies. These were the arrogant, triumphant, industrious sons of Cain. The problem with this list? These were godless men. These were men of power and renown, but they promoted a godless culture. Why was it godless? Because they had set their affections, their minds upon things below. These were those who lived for what the world had to offer. And while they had success for a time, what happened to them? They all perished in the Flood.

Then, beginning in Genesis 5, we read of the descendents of Seth and have a long list of nothing more than dull reading, a so and so became the father of so and so. They seemingly did nothing spectacular and are not noted in the text as having accomplished anything greater than being born. These did not make headline news but it would appear that they were not living for

+ Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

this world, but rather for one to come. Those in Genesis 5 could be said to have been those who were *in* the world, but were certainly not *of* the world. By the time we come to Noah, we learn that he lived by faith and was not bound to live according to the world's definition of time and success, building something that had never been seen or understood, a huge ark. In Hebrews 11:7 we read

By faith Noah, being warned by God about things not yet seen, in reverence prepared an ark for the salvation of his household, by which he condemned the world, and became an heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.

Beloved, Noah was a man who had set his mind on things above. He was intent on things above and demonstrated that as he built that ark for 120 years. How long do you stay focused on God? How long do you endure in your efforts for God. By faith, Noah built that ark; taking over 100 years to do so; and yet we can sometimes fail to keep to a Bible reading plan for a few months. Do you want to be known as the man with the muck-rake, always turning over the filthy stinking mud in the hope of finding something that at best brings only a moments satisfaction; or do you want to be known as one with the faith of Noah, the persevering, heaven-focused, salvation desiring faith of Noah. Will we cry out with Christiana, "Oh! Deliver me from this muck-rake?" Beloved, set your mind on things above! Dwell on God; mediate on His Word; consider the glories of the Son; walk in and by the Spirit. How little do we pray for deliverance from the muck-rake! And sometimes, even when we do in times such as this, we utter such a statement without heart because the very conduct of our lives can betray this prayer. We do not weep as we ought over our tendency to look down rather than to look up and fail to pray for others and ourselves with fear and trembling to be delivered from such. When was the last time you shed a generous tear for your sins and disingenuous conduct toward the Lord, preferring the sticks and straws of this world rather than the unsearchable riches of Christ and the salvation of your soul? Let us mourn our sin, let us repent of our sin; let us be reformed from our sin; and let us then set our minds on everything good, everything right, everything pleasant, and everything wholesome as found in our Lord Jesus Christ who is at the right hand of God.

In Light of the Raptured Christ, Let Us See

We have been considering God's expectation upon His redeemed to live in the reality of the Raptured Christ. Because Jesus is presently at the right hand of God, we are to keep seeking things above and to set our minds on things above in contrast to the things that are offered on this earth. But there is one more aspect of living in the reality of the raptured Christ; that is, what we are to see. We read in verse three, ***For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God.*** Let us not forget, that this is a statement declaring how we ought to see ourselves and therefore how we ought to live. In all the world's great literary works; in all its philosophies, where do we read anything like that found in these thirteen words? Consider, "you have died"; "your life is hidden"; your life (all that you are and will be) is hidden, but it is not lost because it is hidden where, with Christ! And where is Christ? He is in God; in God's presence; enjoying God's fellowship; experiencing all of God's blessings. Therefore, if we have been raised with Christ, we are kept with Christ in the presence of God. What does this mean? It means that we are now beyond the power and the penalty of sin, of self and of Satan. Yes, because we still

+ Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

live in the presence of such things, we can sometimes struggle, but our life; our salvation; our hope; our faith; it is all bound up with Christ who is safe and secure in heaven. Therefore, God's expectation upon us is to live in the hope of heaven. What does this mean? It means that everything has changed for us. To have died, is to die to sin and to self. This is what we read in 2 Corinthians 5:14-15

14 For the love [affection] of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that one died for all, therefore all died; 15 and He died for all, so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf.

Since my life is hid with Christ, my life is to now reflect Christ's will; Christ's heart and Christ's priorities. While I am truly still on this earth physically, spiritually, my mind, my purposes, and my pursuits are all to reflect heavenly attitudes; because my life is hid with Christ. That means that my heart and affections are already with God and ought therefore to reflect God. If this all sounds repetitive, blame Paul, for he is the one that said the same thing emphatically over and over in our text; keep seeking, set your mind and see your position in Christ. Because Christ is raised, you are raised; because Christ is at the right hand of God, enjoying all the benefits of that position, everyone who is in Christ ought to live in light of the same position, honoring the same God, enjoying the same blessings.

In Psalm 16 we have a passage that is called Messianic; that is, it speaks of Jesus Christ, Jesus the Messiah. However, while it speaks first of Jesus, because our lives are hidden in Him, it also then speaks of all who are in Christ. Listen to these words of hope from Psalm 16:7-11 -

7 I will bless the Lord who has counseled me; Indeed, my mind instructs me in the night. 8 I have set the Lord continually before me; Because He is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. 9 Therefore my heart is glad and my glory rejoices; My flesh also will dwell securely. 10 For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol; Nor will You allow Your Holy One to undergo decay. 11 You will make known to me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; In Your right hand there are pleasures forever.

Beloved, because these things are true for Christ, because He is risen from the dead and raptured to the right hand of God; for those who are raised with Him by faith, believing that Jesus died for their sins and that His blood appeased the wrath you deserved from God and that as Jesus was then raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life; to walk in light of the raptured Christ; to walk, to talk, to act even as Christ did. Is this not the expectation of God upon you, if you profess Christ? As 1 John 2:4-6 says;

4 The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him; 5 but whoever keeps His word, in him the love of God has truly been perfected. By this we know that we are in Him: 6 the one who says he abides in Him ought himself to walk in the same manner as He walked.

There it is, ***"the one who says he abides in [Jesus] ought himself to walk [to live and behave] in the same manner as [Jesus] walked."*** This is our calling! This is our God-revealed

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

"... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything"(Colossians 1:18).

expectation! This is our delight and privilege. Let me close then by bringing to your attention some of the ways in which Jesus walked; some of the things He did that demonstrated His obedience to the expectations of God on Him and then by seeing these things; seeing how we, if we have been raised up with Christ and are seeking, setting and seeing our lives in light of His; how we too ought to walk in this same manner. This is the practical living out of seeking, setting and seeing the reality of the raptured Christ.

1. Jesus recognized and trusted in God's character:

Jesus constantly acknowledged who God is and rehearsed God's character before others (Matthew 6:9-13). Even in His trials, Jesus thanked God for the reminder these things were of His need for the Father and all the good He was accomplishing through the trial (Hebrews 12:2). Will we be so expressive of who God is and humble in our attitudes?

2. Jesus was gentle and patient

Jesus never focused on "what He wanted" rather than upon "what God wanted." Therefore, He loved and treated people in the way God loved them. Jesus, who had every right to be so, was not easily irritated and put off by others, but served them in spite of their irritations (Matthew 9:35-38). Will you be like Jesus, gentle, patient and compassionate with others and going out to tell them of the blessings of the resurrected and raptured Savior?

3. Jesus put the needs of others before His own needs

In an expression of Romans 12:10, Jesus clearly put the needs of others, their need for a Savior requiring His own horrific death on the cross, which He did not deserve, before His own needs. Does this describe you? This is a person who lives in the reality of the resurrected and raptured Christ.

May we prayerfully pursue such things and consider many others in our own lives and live to the position to which we have been granted, born-again, God-honoring, Christ-exalting; Spirit-empowered; Bible-centered; brethren-loving; redeemed people revealing the reality of our redemption by continual moral and spiritual changes in our lives that bring glory to God.

Soli Deo Gloria

Copyright © 2010 Edward K. Godfrey. *This message is the sole property of the copyright holder and may be copied only in its entirety for circulation freely without charge. All copies of this message must contain the above copyright notice. This message may not be copied in part (except for small quotations used with citation of source), edited, revised, copied for resale or incorporated in any commercial publications, recordings, broadcasts, performances, displays or other products offered for sale, without the written permission of the copyright holder. Requests for permission should be made in writing and addressed to Edward K. Godfrey, Pastor, Hope Community Bible Church, and 2300 South 13th Street, Rogers, AR 72758.*