

## Better Look Up

*Since then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God  
Colossians 3:1*

Hello Dear Listeners;

I came across a humorous little poem from the hand of the Rev. Halford E. Luccock who was a professor of homiletics ( the art of preaching) at Yale Divinities School during the last century. He's the one perhaps best remembered for his many witty sayings such as his slogan ,“ *I believe in comforting the afflicted and afflicting the comfortable.*” He evidently believed in preaching with wisdom, and, if possible, with wit. Here's that little poem with its serious lesson about life.

*If your nose is close to the grindstone rough,  
And you hold it down there long enough,  
In time you'll say there's no such thing  
As brooks that babble and birds that sing.  
These three will all your world compose:  
Just you, the stone, and your old nose.*

Could that be the way many people live? In spite of the fact this is still Our Father's World? Yes, it is at the same time a broken world yet, those who inhabit it can have clear vision and look up, look up instead of always looking down.

I heard a Christian evangelist evangelist say,

There are many strictly earth-bound creatures and as a rule they are always looking down at the ground, into which they will

eventually go. You could say they literally have their eyes on their goal - *the grave!*

It's true isn't it. Such people may be very busy "Taking care of business", as they'll tell you. Yet they don't seem to even notice what's going on around them. They certainly don't "*smell the roses.*" They're too busy looking down, down to the things and cares of this world and they pursue these things, whether it be fortune, fame or foolishness with vigour.

Yet looking down only can be a rather fruitless and even pointless exercise. It really doesn't provide anyone any security. It will not make you or me feel better or live longer. In fact if you keep looking down you will not be looking up to Him *who has the whole universe in his hand.* You won't even get a glimpse of Jesus Christ, who was raised from the dead and today is seated at God's right hand, that is in power and glory.

Sad, isn't it that even at Easter, when people should be celebrating Jesus death and resurrection, his conquest of hell and the grave they're still looking,,down! Even Easter gets cluttered up with earthly things, bunnies and eggs and bonnets and fashion parades ( if these are still to be seen nowadays). But the risen and exalted Christ seems to be more removed from people's minds and certainly,people's adoration.

A long time ago the apostle Paul wrote a letter, actually it was God's own letter which He inspired that apostle to write. It is the letter to the Colossians, a Christian church in one of a cluster of cities in what today is Western Turkey.

It was a city in an area plagued by many an earthquake. In that city, as in many others in Paul's day there had been other upheavals, even of a spiritual nature. The Word of God had been preached there and a congregation of Jesus Christ had been established there.

But that didn't mean the Christians who lived there had an easy time of it. Hardly, for they were confronted by false teaching by those who thought they had wisdom, could read mysteries and had mystic insight into things. That all took away from the sufficiency of Jesus Christ who had been proclaimed to the Colossians as the Only and Complete Saviour.

After hearing from a man called Epaphras, ( Colossians 1:8; 4:12) how things were in Colosse, Paul, by this time imprisoned, likely in Rome, wrote them a letter. Right from the beginning he urged his readers to consider the supremacy of Christ.

Did the false teachers undermine Paul's teaching by insisting on human wisdom and all kinds of earthly regulations of "*Do not do this and don't touch that*"? ( ch. 2: 21) Paul reminded the church they died to this old way of life, "*with Christ.*" They had been raised with him, joined to him in a new kind of life. Instead of getting stuck in a ritual which elevated all kinds of avoidance: of oil, wine, meat, as well as contact with strangers or those who were to be considered "religious inferiors" Paul said,

*"Set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God."* ( ch. 3:1) It is true, elsewhere in this letter we learn that the Colossians were in danger of falling back into that heathen way of life from which they had been delivered, by the Holy Spirit through the preaching of the Gospel. But now, the solution to meeting that danger was not to fall back into yet another kind of peril, that of a legalistic, man-centred religion of avoidance.

No, then as now, *the answer was, and is Christ.* Jesus Christ, seated in glory, in majesty, As that beautiful hymn says "*In Christ alone my hope is found, He is my light, my strength, my song; This Cornerstone, this solid ground, firm through the fiercest drought and storm....*

Their union with Christ was to make all the difference. It was to change, transform their whole life: mind heart and will ( Philippians 3:10).

Says Paul, “*Therefore seek the things that are above.*” That certainly implies making a concerted effort. Yet their seeking was not so much a discovery expedition as it was a lining up to obtain, from the right source most important, spiritual things.

We may think of such jewels, treasures, as Paul would go on to enumerate a bit further on in chapter three of this letter. Things like: compassion, kindness, humility, meekness and patience, forgiveness, and, above all love! If a Christian’s heart is filled with these things there wouldn’t be any room for earthly, fleshly practices, and indulgences.

Why did Paul say they had to go “above” to heaven, to look for the good things? Because Christ is seated there. The risen and exalted Christ who with his victory over sin and death said, “*All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.*” ( Matthew 28: 18).

Those who are risen with him have a place in his program. His program which involves the building of His kingdom. That kingdom which is his all-encompassing rule over all things. A rule that is powerful, and life-changing. An authority in which, those who submit to it will see his close citizens one day sit on thrones and judge angels ( 1 Corinthians 6: 1-4 ).

Meanwhile we keep on looking up to him and to ask him what he wants us to do. We keep our eyes on him and follow his lead in everything. We can’t do that if we become so attached to the things of this world that it distorts our vision. Then the danger is that by always looking down we fail to cherish the amazing power and joy of Christ’s resurrection and ascension. We begin more and more to worry and to want to take our lives, our future into our hands. In the process we

become prey to all kinds of temptations and the attempts of the devil to undermine our hope, our faith.

Looking, up, to Jesus Christ, will surely mean bringing all our requests, our petitions and our thanksgiving to Him. For he is there to make intercession for those who entrust their lives to him. Already in the Old Testament the Lord caused this truth to be broadcast that he, God's Son would be a Fount of blessing for his people. ( Psalm 36:9; Joel 3:18 ).

Therefore dear listeners, when you and I seek to obtain the *"things that are above"* we're not chasing phantoms but *" we're gathering priceless treasures."*<sup>1</sup> For " He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty..... He will command his angels concerning you, to guard you in all your ways." ( Psalm 91: 1, 11)

Therefore look up and live! For Christ's sake, Amen, and thank you for listening today.

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<sup>1</sup> W. Hendriksen , The New Testament Commentary Colossians and Philemon p. 140.