



BELIEVERS CHAPEL

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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Colossians 3:1-4

"Christ Our Life, Now and Then"

TRANSCRIPT

[Message] We are, of course, always delighted to have the visitors and Howard has made reference to them. We are grateful for you who are here as visitors today and for those of you who are regularly here, but nevertheless, visits elsewhere while we're having the service, we're also glad to have you as well. [Laughter]

Our Scripture reading this morning is Colossians chapter 3 and verse 1 through verse 4. A very short passage, and as a matter of fact, it's so short and so plain that I don't even have an opportunity to make too many corrections in the text that I'm reading. And so, we will probably have a very short Scripture reading which makes for an ideal Sunday morning. We have more time for the message.

So anyway, we're turning to Colossians chapter 3, and we're reading verse 1 through verse 4. The apostle writes, "If then ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above."

Now we do have to make a slight change here. I'm sure there are some of you who have a modern translation must have something different. I didn't bother to look them up this week, but the word translated "set your affection upon" is a word that lays stress upon the intellectual, and so we actually could render it something like "set your

minds upon," and that would be more appropriate for "set your affections" suggests the emotional rather than the intellectual, and the apostle is stressing the intellectual. "Set your mind on the things above not on things on the earth. For ye are dead."

Now actually the Greek text says, "You have died." And the reference then lays stress upon the act of death and specifically of the identification of the believer in our Lord's death. So we should render it, "For ye died and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory."

May the Lord bless this reading of his word, and we bow now for a moment of prayer.

[Prayer] Our Father, we are grateful to Thee for this portion of Paul's letter to the Colossians and for its stress upon putting our priorities straight. We thank Thee for the apostle's exhortation that we seek the things upon, that we set our minds upon things above for so often we, as he wrote to the Philippians, mind earthly things. Deliver us Lord from that and enable us to truly set our minds and hearts upon the things that are above where Christ is sitting at the right hand of the Father.

We thank Thee for this day in which we live and for the opportunities of it. And we pray, Lord, Thy blessing upon us, upon the ministry of the Chapel, on its elders and deacons, and upon the friends and visitors who are here with us today we ask a specially blessing upon them. We give Thee thanks Lord for the outreach Thy hast enabled the chapel to have, and we pray that it may be fruitful and profitable for the edification of the church of Jesus Christ and for the enlargement of that body. We commit that ministry to Thee. And we pray too, Lord for the ministry of the whole church of Jesus Christ. Not simply this local manifestation, but all of the manifestations in this locality and over the face of this country, and in fact, of the world. May the whole church of Jesus Christ be strengthened and built up in the faith. And may we, Lord, be prepared for the coming again of our Lord Jesus Christ.

We thank Thee for our country and as we celebrate in the United States of America the liberties that we enjoy, help us as citizens to remember that our ultimate loyalty is not to this country but to the one who is sovereign over all of this universe, our Lord, our triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. May we truly have our priorities arranged in their proper order and place.

We ask Lord Thy blessing upon those who are mentioned in our Calendar of Concern and who have requested our prayers. We pray for them. We commit them Lord to Thee. We thank Thee that Thou art able to meet the needs that exist, and we entrust Thee to work for that which is for our good. We commit them to Thee. We commit the doctors who minister to them to Thee, and the families, and the needs that are represented by those requests. We ask Thy blessing and pray that Thou would answer these prayers in a way that would glorify Thy name through the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ask Father as we study, as we sing, as we reflect and ponder upon the word of God that we may truly set our minds upon things that are above and not upon things upon this earth. May the ministry of the word of God strengthen us for the week that lies before us we pray. In Jesus name. Amen.

[Message] One of the nice things about the bulletin today is the fact that we have on the right side of the page a section from Charles Haddon Spurgeon on one of the aspects of the text that is part of the message this morning. And so I hope that if you have not read it that you will take it home and read it. And in case you don't get anything out of the message that I give you, you have a little message from Mr. Spurgeon that is very apropos that you can take with you.

The subject for this morning is "Christ our Life, Now and Then." From a Roman prison to a small house church in Philemon's dwelling went Paul's letter to the Colossians. Converted through Epaphras, Paul's own convert, they were now troubled by heresy. And the apostle wrote the Epistle to the Colossians to exhort and to encourage, presenting

the Lord Jesus as the focus of all history and sovereign of all the cosmos. In the context in which we've come in our study of Colossians, the apostle has just explained our sufficient fullness in Christ. He has stated in verse 9 and 10, "For in him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power."

Now, of course, when the apostle wrote that he was thinking primarily of the union that we enjoy with the Lord Jesus Christ. One of the nice things about the Bible is the fact that the Lord Jesus Christ is set forth so plainly and clearly as the representative head of the people of God. In the Old Testament in the sacrifices that Israel was called upon to carry out as part of the ritual of being an Israelite in good standing, among those sacrifices was the sacrifice described in Leviticus chapter 1 of the burnt offering. You may remember the details. An individual who wished to offer this offering brought a sacrifice of the herd. It was to be a male without blemish. He should offer it for his acceptance, and he should do it at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation before the Lord.

And as he brought his animal, the priest was to be sure that the animal was without blemish for it should be a representative animal, illustrative of the Lord Jesus Christ who was without sin, without blemish morally. And further at the time of the sacrifice of the animal which the priest performed, the individual who brought the member of the herd should put out his hand and put his hand upon the head of the animal signifying thereby his identification with the animal. He was identified with the animal in the animal's without blemish, and thus of course, representative of the Lord Jesus Christ. And as the animal was slain that too, was representative of the ultimate death of the Redeemer, the Lord Jesus Christ.

So in a sense there was a two-fold thing that happened there. The sins of the individual when he put his hand upon the animal were transferred to the animal, and the unblemished state of the animal representing our Lord Jesus Christ and the work that he would accomplish, the benefits of that or the significance of it was transferred to the

individual who brought the offering. So that in a sense a great transference happened there by which the individual received that which was ultimately was to signify the righteousness of the Lord Jesus Christ and also the benefits of the death of the Lord in bearing the penalty of his sins.

Now that was a representative transaction. The animal and the things that happened to the animal stood for the individual. In fact, Isaac Watts has caught the sense of it when in one of his hymn there is the stanza, "My faith would lay her hand on that dear head of Thine. While like a penitent I stand and there confess my sin."

So representation is written into the whole fabric of the word of God. And if we should understand the Bible, we must understand the principle of representation. The Lord Jesus acting not simply for himself but for the people of God. That is so important. Sometimes we call that a federal relationship because federal means simply covenantal. Foederis, in Latin means covenant.

So that federal representation or covenantal representation or simply the principles of representation. Those things are important for understanding the Bible. If you do not grasp that then I assure you, that you will have difficulty in understanding the word of God; that is, if you seek to understand it in a clear way. So the apostle has said, "In him dwelleth all the fullness of the Godhead bodily," and we have been filled full in him. That's representation.

Now further, the apostle has gone on the point out that the erroneous rules and regulations which the false teachers had sought to impose upon the Colossian believers, they were wrong, and he warned them against the observance of them. We don't know all of the details. We know simply what Paul put here. He said that they included such things as, "Touch not; taste not; handle not." And further, he said, "Let no man," this is the 16th verse of the preceding chapter. "Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days." So there

was a combination of Jewish things and heathen things in the heresy that had afflicted the little church that met in Philemon's house.

Well now the apostle, when we come to chapter 3 in his epistle to these fruitless exercises of the false apostles, he opposed the true exercises or the heavenly meditations of believers versus these childish rudiments. In fact, someone has said, "What we have now is the true ascetism." The ascetism of the false teachers was taste not, touch not, handle not, but now the apostle says there is an ascetism that is characteristic of Christians and it is composed of the instructions that the apostle will now give. "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above." Set your mind on things above not on things on the earth. This is the true ascetism of Christianity.

Now we want to look at verses 1 through 4 and our subject "Christ our Life, Now and Then." And the first thing that the apostle emphasizes in the first two verses of chapter 3 is the exhortation to things above. The secular life engrossed in the fleshly, the material, the psychological, and the philosophical is by the Apostle Paul opposed to true spiritual life.

Now if you read other things that Paul wrote you will get something of the sense of what he was driving at. For example, in Philippians chapter 3 in another of his prison epistles written in the relatively same period of the apostle's life, in the 14th verse of the 3rd chapter of that book the apostle writes, "I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Or as he puts it in the original text, "the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus." And then in verse 19 in that same chapter he says speaking of the false teachers who are enemies of the cross of Christ, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."

So for the apostle it was possible for individuals to mind earthly things, but believing Christians are to set their minds on things above. He says we are to seek and

we are to set our minds upon. In other words, "We are not only to seek heaven but we are to think heaven as well," as Bishop Lightfoot has put it.

Now let's concentrate for a moment on the exhortation to seek. "If ye then be risen with Christ," and there is no question about that. The apostle is not giving us an if that might suggest doubt, but the same kind of if that I might be thinking about when you told me for example, that you were going to the mall to do some shopping. I might say to you well now if you are going to the mall would you do this for me? And I do not mean to cast any doubt upon what you have told me you are going to do, but simply to reason from that. Well that's the sense of the condition here. We often here Greek grammarians say there's certain kinds of conditions that you can translate by sense. I don't object to that. I simply say it's not necessary. English has the same sense that Greek has, and we use if in the sense of since.

Now we could render this, "Since you are risen with Christ seek those things which are above," but it is not necessary. We have that sense in English so why should we bother to go out of our way to explain that?

Now you know I don't have any thing against explaining what the Greek text has to say, but we ought to explain the things that we ought to explain and not bother to explain the things that are unnecessary. Paul is not in any way casting any doubt upon the fact that we have died with him, and we have been raised together with him. So he says, "If ye then be risen with Christ," he said just above we have died with him, "seek those things which are above." In other words, it's perfectly alright for us to talk about a seeking believer. We have the tendency to speak about individuals who are not believers yet as seekers. Well I always object to that a little bit, because the tendency of that kind of language is to suggest that a man may really seek of himself. Whereas the Scriptures plainly say, "There is none that seeketh after God. No. Not one." And yet at the same time the Bible does describe certain people as seeking after God.

Now if we put those two things together it's obvious that we can only harmonize them if we assume that what a man seeks after God he doesn't do it naturally, he does it because God has already begun to work in him. So that a seeker after God is one that has already received the benefits of the grace of God.

Now as believers the same thing is true. We do not seek after God as believers apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit within us. So when he says, "If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above," the apostle is not suggesting that we should seek of ourselves, but he means to seek with the help of the Holy Spirit which is our possession, and the person whom God has given to us to aid us in our spiritual life. There are people who would like to read this as well, I will seek those things which are above as a believer, if the Holy Spirit causes me to seek, but I won't bother until the Holy Spirit causes me to seek. Well, let me remind you that the Scriptures say we are to seek. There's no question about whether we should or should not. The Scriptures when they say seek the things that are above promise the enablement of the Holy Spirit as we seek. So we cannot, for example say I have not yet been moved by the Holy Spirit to seek the Lord God and I won't seek till the Holy Spirit moves me. Well, God has already told us to do it. We don't need any Holy Spirit to move us to seek the Lord God. He's already told us that, and he's promised us that the presence of the Holy Spirit and the enablement of the Holy Spirit will be ours as we seek.

Further, the apostle uses the present tense and suggests that this is not simply something that we do once in awhile, maybe on Sunday morning between eleven and twelve or between eight-thirty and nine-thirty, or in Sunday school hour, or in the evening at the Lord's Table, but this is something that should characterize believers. We are seeking individuals; seeking believers. This is the true human search for God that continues after we've come to know Jesus Christ as our personal Savior. We are seekers after those things which are above.

Now when Paul describes the things which are above what is he talking about? Many of us have limited vision, and consequently, we don't see very high. Well Scripture if we were to look for some definition in a general way we would say the things that are above are the things where Christ is at home and the things where Christ is at work. Looking at the context of this particular epistle, I'd like to suggest that included in the things that are above are these. First of all, the apostle when he says, "Seek the things that are above," means to avoid the legalistic ceremonies that he's just been talking about. In other words, avoid the "touch not; taste not; handle not" prescriptions that are offered by the false teachers.

So the avoidance of legalistic ceremonies forcing us to grovel in earthly rules, those are the things that the apostle is talking about when he says, "Seek the things that are above." So often Christian's do get entangled in the taboos which individuals who are simply earthly believers have sought to lay upon us, and we should remember that the Scriptures do speak of the great principles of the word of God, but the application of them may differ among us, may differ among us in certain situations and at times may be valid for certain situations. But we don't have time to go into those details.

The second thing that I think must have been in Paul's mind, ultimately, at least is the avoidance of the earthly lusts that the apostle goes on immediately to take about in verse 5. "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." "Seek the thing that are above...Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth." And then we have the list of sins and other things that characterize the life that is upon earth. So the fleshly, the materialistic, and the humanistic, these are things that are to be avoided when a Christian seeks and sets his mind upon the things that are above.

Now think also if we were to look at this and seek to identify it even a bit more closely, we would say that what the apostle is essentially saying is to pursue the paramount things. If I may be allowed a bit of slang, to pursue the things that get top billing in heaven. I think there are the things the psalmist was speaking about in the

42nd Psalm and in verses 1 and 2 when he expresses his aspiration in, I think, these marvelous words.

"As the hart panteth after the water brooks, so panteth my soul after thee, O God. My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God? My tears have been my meat day and night, while they continually say unto me, Where is thy God? When I remember these things, I pour out my soul in me: for I had gone with the multitude, I went with them to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday. Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted in me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him for the help of his countenance. O my God, my soul is cast down within me: therefore will I remember thee from the land of Jordan, and of the Hermonites, from the hill Mizar. Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts: all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life. I will say unto God my rock, Why hast thou forgotten me? why go I mourning because of the oppression of the enemy? As with a sword in my bones, mine enemies reproach me; while they say daily unto me, Where is thy God? Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God."

Here is an individual who truly panted after God, who truly was seeking the things that were above, setting his mind upon the things that were above. Those are the things that get top billing in heaven. Ralph Waldo Emerson is responsible for the phrase, "to hitch your wagon to a star," and that is essentially what a Christian does when he thinks about, sets his mind upon the things that are above. The person who used the expression "the choice and master spirits of the age," was William Shakespeare. "The

choice and master spirits of the age," are not found in Harvard. Our universities have lost their touch with God in the main. And "the choice and master spirits of the age," are not found in Washington which has never had a significant touch with the God of the Scriptures. And they are not found in Rome nor are they found in Nashville, for organized religion like that of the days of our Lord cannot really abide the doctrine of sin and grace. "The choice and master spirits of the age," are still the prophets and the apostles who counsels tear off the mask of sin and hypocrisy of our age and disclose the cosmic Christ as the solution to human doom and despair.

So when we say seek the things that are above, sets you mind upon the things that are above we are talking about following the teaching of the word of God as expressed in the words of Moses and the prophets and the apostles of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. They are the BMOC's in heaven. And for those of you who are as old as I am, maybe you don't know what BMOC means. Big man on the campus. [Laughter] They are the big men on the campus of heaven, and they are the ones that we are to truly follow.

The second exhortation if I may just lay a little stress on that. "Set our minds upon the things that are above." If the first exhortation is one addressed to the will, this one is addressed to the mind. And it's very important. We think about the things that are above and we think about the words of Scripture in which they might be spelled out in specific texts. Let me suggest some of these things. We read in the word of God about certain possessions; possessions in heaven. Our age is filled with the idea of possessions. We really are not successful if we don't have possessions. We drive certain cars in expression of our possessions. I was talking to a young lady who's been a big success in the state of California, and they have a society out there that is almost determined and defined by the kind of possessions that you have. For example, if you are a very successful person you do drive a Mercedes. But if you've been the owner and possessor of a very successful business which is just gone public, then you drive a red Ferrari, and so on. We live in a

society in which this kind of thing as really grouped us. And in the city of Dallas, the state of Texas, we have a good bit of that too.

Listen to our Lord's words. "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither the moth nor rust dost corrupt and where thieves do not break through nor steal." We also like to be popular, particularly if you're young. Some of us old people like to be unpopular. But nevertheless, popularity is something that most people like to feel that they have a part of at least. It's said of men in our Lord's day they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God. What is more important? God's approval upon our lives or the approval of our fellow men? There can hardly be any argument over the fact that the approval of God is of significance for us who are Christians. Think of Paul's good soldier, "That he may please him who has chosen him to be a soldier," so we read. We read also about pleasures of heaven, "In Thy presence is fullness of joy at Thy right hand there is pleasures forever more." So different from the pleasure of sin for a season.

Then to have a position on the earth as over against a position in heaven. Think about what Scripture says in our Lord's own words. "But rather," he said, "rejoice because your names are written in heaven." The great and the famous among the men of the earth have their names written down here, but more significantly our Lord says is to have your name written in heaven. And therefore, for the Christian who sets his mind of things above the important thing for him is as it was for Paul to "press to the mark for the prize of the upward calling of God in Christ Jesus."

Now we have just gone through a national festival in which we have expended ourselves in an orgy of enthusiasm over the weekend to celebrate the fact that Lady Liberty is one hundred years old. Recently refurbished, proved if you could get close enough to see it, and all of us who are patriotic citizens, and I regard myself as such, are very happy over that. But you know I have been greatly impressed by the fact that the place of the Lord God in our celebration has been practically nil. We celebrate Lady Liberty in all of this gaiety while the true Lord of liberty who gives freedom that is

freedom indeed through the truth that he has proclaimed through his apostles is largely left out. He's lost in the fireworks that we set off down here upon the earth. Even our President says that we should cut loose in celebration of our liberty.

Well if we could just as Christians truly, truly in the spiritual sense allow our Lord to have the first place in our lives what a significant difference we might make here on the face of this earth. Let us never lose our priorities. It's important for us to have part in the celebration in the liberties that we enjoy in this country. If we lived in another country we would truly appreciate them. I've lived in other countries where they had relative freedom, but I was always glad to get back to the United States. I like this country better. I enjoy the freedom that I have. But let me ensure you, there are things that are more important than that. They are the things that have to do with the spiritual freedom that we have through Jesus Christ and those marvelous blessings expressed by the apostle as "the things that are above."

Now Paul lays stress upon it by saying not on the things that are on the earth. He's not repudiating the fact that we must live in the flesh that we must live in the body. Why he wouldn't be that kind of person afflicted with heavenly absentmindedness, so that he could not engage in any kind of earthly activity. We're not talking about that kind of thing. If a man is not cognizant of the fact that he must live down here, he cannot be a mechanic, he cannot be a surgeon, he cannot be a businessman, he cannot be a chef, he cannot be a good husband, he cannot be a good wife, and he cannot take care of the baby or anything like that. But we're talking about priorities, the things that are really important; the things that are above. And to engage in activity that has only to do with the above rather than the things we do down here is just a recipe for pseudo-spirituality that some people unfortunately have become afflicted with too.

Now we go on to read in verse 3 of the foundation of these exhortations. The apostle states in verse 3, "For." Now when Paul writes the word like "for" we look for generally speaking two things. We look for some explanatory comment concerning the

preceding in the sense of a ground or a reason for the preceding statement. Or sometimes we look for the cause of it. I say the ground or the cause or even an explanation, somewhere within those general things.

Now in this case we are referring to the ground of those exhortations. The ground of the exhortation is the fact that we have died and are life has been hid with Christ in God. The ceremonies are dead for us; these false ceremonies, "touch not; taste not; handle not," the taboos are erected by human even human Christian wisdom not found in the word of God.

Now the reason the apostle can say this is the covenant union that we enjoy with the Lord Jesus Christ. For we have died and our life has been hid with Christ in God. Occasionally, we hear Bible teachers talk about covenant theology in a very bad sense. In fact, in some circles it's quite common to say, "But that's covenant theology." And to mean by that that that's bad. We don't do that in Believers Chapel, at least when I'm preaching. I don't know what others may say when they're preaching here. I'm just one of the ministers of the word of God here. But I don't do that, because there are many things that are absolutely essential for Christian theology that can be called covenant theology.

We have individuals I say will speak despairingly of covenant theology but at the same time they will describe our acceptance in Christ in this way. They will say, "The apostle says that we have been accepted in the beloved One." And they will go one to make the point that in Christ we find acceptance. In fact, they will say as I've often said that's why I know they say it. They will say when God looks at us he doesn't see us, he sees Christ, and therefore, we have the acceptance that Christ has. We are given by God's grace the righteousness of God, the righteousness that satisfied him. We are in Christ accepted in the Beloved.

Well, let me just say this. The reason a person can say that is because of covenantal theology. That is, he is our representative. He's the covenantal head. He

stands for the people of God. And because he stands for the people of God, when God sees the people of God, he sees them in Christ. We're talking about covenant theology.

Now there's not, I wouldn't say that I believe everything in covenant theology or everything in dispensational theology or other theologies as well. It seems to me that there are things that can be said negatively about almost all systems of theology. While I don't say them about mine, some of my friends say them, so we can say that with all systems of theology there are some negative things that can be said with reference to them. But do not for one moment think that when we read, "You have died, and your life has been hid with Christ in God," that you're not taking about the fact that we stand in Christ who is our covenantal head. And we have participated in his death, in his burial, and in his resurrection. And because we have participated in his death, burial, and resurrection, we're severed from the past and we're also identified with the Lord Jesus at the right hand of the throne of God.

So the apostle states then that our death is past. Now that's a striking statement, of course, that reminds me of the tombstone of the saint who had put on his tombstone this brief word, "Born Twice, Died Once." Well, "born twice, died once" that's a marvelous expression of a Christian. Born twice, born physically, born again spiritually. Died once, yes, physically. But the second death, eternal death they have received deliverance from. As for the world, born once, died twice. What a tragedy! Born once, died twice, physically, spiritually in eternal death.

So Paul says our death is past. Now he means the death that is eternal. "For you have died, and your life is hid with Christ in God." As a matter of fact, our resurrection is past too; our spiritual resurrection. Notice verse 1, "If then ye be risen with Christ," or in verse 20 of chapter 2, "Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ," or have died with him. These covenantal acts the apostle gathers his thoughts around. So our death is past, our resurrection is past. Well, if you were to say to me I thought we look forward to the

resurrection in the future? We do; bodily resurrection but not our spiritual resurrection. That has taken place in Christ.

Finally, the apostle says, "Your life is hid with Christ in God." Have you ever noticed those expressions "with Christ in God"? Why to be with Christ is sufficient, isn't it? To be in God would be sufficient, but to be with Christ in God. That reminds me of John 10:27 through 29 where we are said to be in the hand of the Son and in the hand of the Father and no one can pluck us out of the hands of the Son or the Father. So we are with Christ in God. What Hanley Moule called a double rampart, all divine. Suggestive, of course, of safety. Reminds me of the Irishman who was having difficulty with the security of the believer and when he saw this verse for the first time he said, "Hallelujah! Have we ever heard of a man drowning with his head that high above water?" With Christ in God certainly suggests safety.

It suggests also a measure of secrecy. That is, the secret springs of our life are at the right hand of the Father. The Lord Jesus as the priest of the saints of God ministers to us even at this very moment. As one of the confidences that a preacher has as he rests in Christ, he realizes even as he expounds the word of God in often a very failing way that the Lord Jesus is really the secret spring of his life and the authority who stands behind him as the word of God is proclaimed.

Now finally in verse 4, we have the culmination of the exhortation and the apostle writes, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." If the root of our life is found in the cross, the ultimate fruit of it will be seen in his coming. The hidden life then has its unveiling in the future. The apostle has said that we are dead and our life has been hid with Christ in God but there is coming a day when the hiddenness of the life shall pass away and the manifestation of it shall take place in this earth. We look forward to that. We count upon that as believers we have biblical hope. We have confidence in the word of God. We have confidence in our Savior. We

believe that the things that are written in Holy Scripture stand the test of history and stand the test of divine testimony through the Holy Spirit.

So these are things upon which we can count. Christ is our life. He shall appear and we shall appear with him in glory. That has a very deep significance for every part of our daily life. Let me illustrate in a very simple way. I'm sure that it's not perfectly adequate, but I think you'll get the point. Now this past week I walked in to the office on Monday or Tuesday and there was a letter on my desk which I had opened but hadn't had time to read. It was addressed to the tape ministry and to Bill McCrae. Obviously the individual had been listening to one of the tapes on marriage, because in speaking to the tape ministry and to Bill he was saying essentially this. He was saying my marriage has come to an end. My wife professed to be a born-again believer. I'm a born-again believer, but our marriage has come tragically to an end and now I want help.

There was several indications in the letter that he felt rather bitter over what had happened not simply toward the person involved but toward God. Listen to how he expressed himself. He speaks of "the absence of any effective effort on God's part" to answer his prayers and restore the marriage. He speaks of being "a fool to believe God would support" the "honor code" set out in the Bible, and of how he "foolishly believed" on God himself. He told us in the tape ministry, not to send him any tracts, not to send him any books, not to send him any tapes, not to send him any verses. He had studied them, and he didn't need that kind of help. He said further, "Neither can appeals to the future which he put in parenthesis (vague and distant), future punishment by God will be sufficient." What he wanted was restoration to use his terms "in fact, real healing and forgiveness."

Well, I wrote him along these lines as you might expect. I said the way to peace of heart lies in confession. I suggested that I noted a couple of occasions in his letter that there was bitterness toward God, but he needed to confess his bitterness to God and he shall commit himself to the Lord God. I said you know if you read the word of God, the

one person who had justification for writing what you have written would be the Lord Jesus Christ. I said he lived the perfect life. You didn't live a perfect life. You're a sinner, and our Lord lived a perfect life. He never thought any thought, he never did anything that was not absolutely in accord with the word of God and yet, he wound up on a Roman cross subjected to the shame of that Roman-Jewish death. Judaism and Gentilism combined to crucify him. If anyone had reason to complain about the honor code of the word of God, it was the Lord Jesus Christ.

But, of course, we know that lying beyond what appears to be the will of God for us according to our limited human understanding lies the will of God, and we know that our Lord really was a victor, and he was a victor by doing precisely what Peter says in 1 Peter chapter 2 and verse 22 and 23 around there where the apostle writes these words. He says in verse 21 of chapter 2,

"For even hereunto were ye called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps: Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth: Who, when he was reviled, reviled not again; when he suffered, he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously."

And I suggested that he confess his sin and that he commit himself to the Lord God. Also I tried to encourage him by saying take a good look at Jacob's life. And take a special look at Joseph's life who was sold into slavery by his own brethren, but who later on as he had obviously committed his life to the Lord God, was able to say to them, "You meant it unto me for evil. But God meant it unto me for good."

And about ten days ago I saw just a little thing in *Food for the Flock* magazine. I subscribe to a few of them and put them out on the table occasional as some of you might have read it. There was a little boy and he was writing with a pen and ink like we use to write with when I was young. You would have a pen and you'd have a little bottle

of ink, and so you'd dip the pen in you would write and then you'd dip the pen in again and write. And this little boy was drawing on his mother's desk and she went over and looked at it and she looked at it and she said it was obvious a dog. She looked at the dog and said, "Where is its tail?" He'd drawn a dog without a tail. She said where is its tail? He said, "It's in the bottle." [Laughter]

Well you see the lives of all of us are like that. The tail is in the bottle. We don't really know what the future holds for us nor does that man who wrote me. He doesn't know either. The tail is in the bottle. We're under construction like Hillcrest Road. It's a good definition of eternal life, I thought. [Laughter] When Hillcrest is finished, eternal life.

But the apostle says then in verse 4, I must stop, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory." We look forward to the consummation. In between we are not sure what shall happen, but we know we will be with him and to be with him in glory that's a good description of heaven, isn't it? True life then is found in seeking and setting our minds on things above not in the reckless enthusiasm that characterizes the people about us. The mind and the will set on things that are upward, above. What we need is a Copernicus revolution. And just as it took us thirteen centuries to realize that the center of this planetary universe in which we are apart is not earth, we, but the sun, the Son. And to realize that is like a Copernicus, spiritual revolution.

So cultivate the hidden life. The harvest of fruit depends upon the health of the root. And we have a healthy root. Sometimes in my yard, my plants are affected by root rot. I don't know whether you've ever had that experience or not. That's very discouraging. One day you have an apple tree with apples actually on it. Believe it or not, in Dallas, an apple tree with apples upon it. And go out and look at it two days later and the leaves look like they've been swimming. They're droopy. And a few days later it is obvious that the tree has died of root rot.

Guy King who's written a number of interesting books describes his experience as an Anglican minister in one of his manses. He said there was a pear tree in the manse or on the manse's property. He said he nourished that tree for fifteen years as he served that church. He never could get any fruit. He occasionally would have a nice crop of leaves, but no fruit. He said, "The man who succeeded me the very first year he had a marvelous display of fruit." He said, "I went over and asked him how in the world did you get fruit on your pear tree?" He said, "I ministered to the root." I treated the root.

In the spiritual life if we're going to be what God would have us to be, we must treat the root. And the root is the relationship we enjoy with the Lord Jesus Christ and having him first in our lives. Let me sum it up simply. Seek the things that are above. Set your mind upon the things that are above. And remember that as by God's grace you do that, you have the marvelous promise of God that he will through the Spirit support you and make you fruitful. And I'd like to see you with fruit hanging all over you as a testimony to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

If you're here and you've never believed in him, we invite you to enter into true liberty. Forget Lady Liberty for while, remember the Lord of liberty, the Lord Jesus Christ who has offered the atoning sacrifice by which you may have the forgiveness of sins and a Lord who will govern, and guide, and keep you on through into the ages of eternity. Come to Christ. Believe in him. Trust in him and receive by grace the gift of life. May we stand for the benediction.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for these magnificent words from the apostle. How they must have thrilled the Colossian saints and how they still thrill us. Christ our life, both now and then. We look forward to the full enjoyment through the ages of eternity through the life that is to come from our representative head. We pray in his name. Amen.