

Bethel

Pulpit

Seek Those Things that are Above

Sermon Number 491

**Sermon preached at Bethel Chapel, Luton,
by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom,
on Lord's day morning, 16th February, 2020**

Text: *"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." (Colossians 3. 1).*

This verse begins with an *if*. "If ye then be risen with Christ." Now there are other chapters that begin with the word *if*. One beautiful one is this: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ." Immediately we can answer that; we can say, Yes, there is. What would we do without it? That blessed subject of consolation in Christ! What a question that was asked: "Are the consolations of God small?" We know the answer there. We know the answer here: "If there be therefore any consolation in Christ" – that loving comfort and sympathy and compassion.

Now beloved friends, what about this *if*? "If ye then be risen with Christ." Can we answer that question just as surely? Can we answer that *if*? Now, *are* we? Are we really risen with Christ.

So the important thing surely is to know what the Holy Spirit here means by speaking of a sinner being risen with Christ. Of course, it refers to that glorious resurrection on the third day. "Vain the stone, the watch, the seal." "The Lord is risen indeed." Now we believe that the Lord's chosen from everlasting stood in union with the Lord Jesus, and when He died, they were in union with Him, and when He rose from the dead, they were in union with Him. That is what our hymnwriter means – I think it is one of our hymns somewhat misunderstood – he is speaking of the oneness of Christ and His church. That union: "Hail, sacred union, firm and strong!"

"One in the tomb; one when He rose" – that is being risen with Christ – "One when He triumphed o'er His foes."

William Gadsby once put it very quaintly. He said, "Christ and His church were never two."

"If ye then be risen with Christ." Now that is one aspect of it. It is an aspect of it that took place two thousand years ago in the garden of Joseph of Arimathea. But you and I can never really go back and trace

whether we were there or whether we were not. But the second meaning of being risen with Christ is really the equivalent of being born again. We are all “dead in trespasses and sins.” When the appointed time comes for us to be born again, for new life to be put into our hearts, it is the power of Christ’s resurrection, and it is that same power that raised Christ from the dead that raises a sinner from spiritual death in the new birth when real, Holy Ghost conversion takes place.

Now perhaps that brings us a little closer. “If ye then be risen with Christ.” Do we know anything of that difference? Do we know anything of that power being made known in our hearts? Do we know that life where all was dead before, opening our eyes, enabling us to say, “Whereas I was blind, now I see,” giving us that fresh appetite, that longing, that hungering, that thirsting after the Saviour, that complete difference made, that longing to know true, spiritual blessings?

Now I am sure that many here can answer that second *if*: “If ye then be risen with Christ.” And beloved friends, it is a solemn thing if you and I go to chapel all our lives and all our days, and we have never known that spiritual change made in our hearts by the power of Christ’s resurrection. But I do hope that little desire springs up in someone’s heart, even at this moment: “That I may know Him, *and the power of His resurrection.*” Let me not live and die a stranger to it.

“If ye then be risen with Christ.” But having said all that, it does seem to me that here, instead of an *if* of doubt, an *if* being a question, the Holy Spirit is using this word *if*, as so often it is used in the New Testament, meaning *since*, or *because*. *Because* ye are risen with Christ, or, *since* ye are risen with Christ, “seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” So this is a lovely word. It is a loving commandment. It is exhorting us to set our affections on things above, not on things beneath.

Of course, that is the verse which immediately follows, which seems to undergird everything in this verse: “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Sometimes it is good hearing when you can put the text, or something the minister says, into a prayer. Well, don’t we need this, and again we put it into a prayer. Lord, my affections are often lying here below. Could it please Thee in love and mercy to take possession of

my affections and set them on things above – turning the exhortation into a prayer. The Lord will not be displeased with such a prayer as this.

So it is a lovely word, beloved friends, but I must say there is a measure of correction in it, a measure of reproof in it. Now what do I mean? Well, even if the Lord has dealt with us, we still have carnal minds, don't we! "To be carnally minded is death; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace." If we are honest, often our affections are *not* on things above. They *are* on things beneath. If Christ makes us honest, we are not always seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness. Often we are putting that second, and the Lord will not have anything second. No. This worldly-mindedness which is ours! How often are we seeking these things which are above? If you look back, yesterday, last week, no doubt lots of things you had to seek for – right things, necessary things, things in your home, things in your family, things in your business, things in your circumstances, small things, big things. But how much was there seeking those things which are above? Or was there any true seeking those things which are above?

So there is a reproof here, beloved friends, and we need it, and it is a mercy if we can fall under it. I think some of our best hearing times are not just the comforts, but when the Lord comes and finds us out, and lovingly lays His hand upon something where we are coming short. I am sure we all in greater or less measure come short on this point: spiritual-mindedness; and how often it is worldly-mindedness, carnality, the things of time and sense.

So this is a loving exhortation to consider our thoughts. I often think of the apostle's prayer, that *every thought* might be brought into captivity to the obedience of Christ. Because I am sure you all realise that real religion has so much to do with our thoughts. So this is the Holy Spirit's exhortation, a loving exhortation, and I said, the second verse, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth," seems to undergird it, and then all the rest of Colossians chapter 3 is really a commentary on it.

"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God." Now that is the clue to it all. That is the only way we can ever set our affections on things above. That is the only way we can ever be delivered from carnality and death, if our

thoughts and affections, by the Holy Spirit's enabling, are set on this glorious Person. He sets a glorious Person before us. That is where it all centres. It is in the Person, it is in the work of Christ, and as you are enabled to seek Christ, whether it is in the beginning, or whether it is in old age, you will find your affections are being set on things above, not on things beneath. There is that prayer:

“Ascended Saviour, fix our eyes,
By faith upon this glorious prize!”

Because there is something special in it. As you seek to meditate on the Person of Christ, and His greatness, and His glory, and His love, and His sympathy, and His finished work, and where He is now, Christ exalted, you will find there is a drawing in it.

“’Tis Christ, the bright and Morning Star,
Draws my affections from afar.”

Let me appeal to some of you. In your early days, your spiritual beginnings, the world was nothing then. Perhaps wonderful things or awful things were happening in the world, but you were almost heedless of them. It was one thing. It was a Person. You wanted to be prepared for heaven. You wanted to be made right. You wanted to be forgiven. But all these things were in a Person, and how beautifully the Holy Spirit sets Him before us here. “Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” This is not just Christ risen; this is Christ exalted. This is Christ glorified. This is the One for you to seek. It is a wonderful thing when you find Him. O but you will feel such a blessing in seeking after Him. Don’t take it for granted you are seeking after Him, but if you are truly seeking after Him, to know Him, His salvation and His love, you will feel that drawing power, that attraction, the work of the Spirit, like a magnet drawing your affections towards Christ.

Just to pause there. You young ones, you children know what a magnet is. If you put it into a box and there are some steel shavings, they jump out. The magnet pulls them towards it. And not only does it pull them towards it; they stick there. That is what we need, when it is like that heavenly magnet drawing our affections to the Saviour. How little we know. How we should be ashamed. How we should long for more.

Now this beautiful description, this glorious Person: “Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” That word *sitteth* has a lot in it. It means that the

work of Christ, the work of redemption is finished. I suggest all of you read those chapters at times in the ceremonial law. You read of the furniture there was in the tabernacle and later in the temple. Have you noticed one thing? There was one thing missing in the tabernacle and in the temple. There was not a chair there. God did not provide a chair. You know what that means. The work under the ceremonial law was never finished. There was a succession of high priests. It was “not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.” So they could never sit down, content that their work was finished.

“But this Man, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God” – His work for ever finished. And O what a work it was, the work of redemption, saving a multitude that no man could number, with His own precious blood, and none but the Son of God eternal could do this. He must become a real Man, and He must go to the cross, and there He must lay down His life a sacrifice, and suffer, and bleed, and then die, bearing the weight of all the sins of all His people and bearing them for ever away. And then He said, “It is finished.” Now He is for ever sat down in heaven, but it was a wonderful word that the Lord Jesus cried before He died: “It is finished.”

But in one sense, though He sat down in heaven, there is still that work. We sing,

“... He lives to carry on
His people’s cause above.”

It is this:

“For Thy people Thou art pleading;
There Thou dost their place prepare;
Ever for them interceding,
Till in glory they appear.”

But beloved friends, when you hear words like this, don’t you long to be persuaded of your personal interest in it! “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?” He sat down. There is a beautiful scripture on it as well. It is this: “But this Man, because He continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. Wherefore He is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by Him, seeing He ever liveth to make intercession for them.”

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” So the first thing we are told of Him: that He has sat down. And the second thing: “on the right hand of God” – which I take to mean *the place of special honour*. That is why,

“With heaven and earth at His command,
He waits to answer prayer.”

And that is where He sits as the glorious Mediator between God and man, where He appears, the sinner’s Surety, the sinner’s everlasting All – this place of honour which is rightly His from everlasting because He is the Son of God. But then doubly so as His Father’s reward for His suffering and death, and there “He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied.” He is a happy Saviour, and sometimes we can rejoice in that, when we have been led by faith to see the horrors that He endured in body and soul, to see that now He is a happy Saviour. He is a satisfied Saviour. He is not disappointed. He does not regret that great work He accomplished. And to think He looks on you as a poor, unworthy sinner and He is happy about what He did for you! He is satisfied with it. You will know just a little of the opposite in your own heart. You will be satisfied with the Saviour; you will not want any other.

“Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.” Which leaves us with this. This word speaks of “*those things which are above*,” which we have to seek. There are plenty of things not above, beneath, that our hearts by nature would seek. But we are told to “seek those things which are above.” They are worth seeking. They are worth possessing. What a theme this is: those things which are above!

Well, one thing we immediately know, that these things which are above are all connected with the Person and finished work of Christ Himself. There are not two separate things here, the things that are above and then Christ sitting at the right hand of God. All these things are bound up together.

We can only mention a few. One thing to be sought is that *wonderful fulness that dwells in Christ*. “For it pleased the Father that in Him” – His beloved Son – “should all fulness dwell” – that fulness of grace and love and mercy, that fulness of everything a sinner needs. It is one of those “things above.” Grace often teaches by opposites. We realise how

empty we are, but then to see that fulness. That is a lovely word: “Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.” Or as Gadsby puts it,

“Whate’er I need” – body, soul, grace, providence –
“Whate’er I need in Jesus dwells,
And there it dwells for me.”

“Seek those things which are above” – that fulness in Christ.

Another thing to seek: up above there is an everlasting source of that *river which for ever makes glad the city of our God*. You will have many things to make you sad if you belong to the city of our God, but, “There is a river, the streams whereof shall make glad the city of God.” “Things which are above.” How the Apostle John in the Revelation had to look up, and he saw “a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.” In a sense it is the same as that glorious fulness, but here it is spoken of as a river, and all its streams flow from above, from beneath the throne of God, from His everlasting purpose of mercy to unworthy sinners, and they flow downwards. John Kent says,

“I stood amazed” – have you ever stood amazed?
“I stood amazed, and wondered when,
Or why, this ocean rose,
That wafts salvation down to men” – it is an unusual
word, but there is a lot in it –
“That *wafts* salvation down to men,
His traitors and His foes.”

Then it flows by the way of the cross, like the smitten rock in the wilderness, and there these streams flow from Calvary, and the Spirit directs them. But why should you seek them? “Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst.” You will find satisfaction there, in these streams of love and mercy. I am sure of this: we must never lay down too harsh lines of what the beginning of the work of grace is – the older I get, the more I admire sovereignty in this – but I do feel every sinner born again will have that thirst, just like a newborn baby. That baby hungers and thirsts. Its need must be satisfied. It is a mark of life. So you will thirst. Cowper says,

“I thirst, but not as once I did,
The vain delights of earth to share:

Thy wounds, Emmanuel, all forbid
That I should seek my pleasure there.”

“Seek those things which are above” – those streams of love and mercy. And they satisfy, and that word still stands, and Satan has never yet been able to wipe it out of Scripture: “If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink.”

“Let him who thirsts for heavenly joys,
Come unto Me, the Saviour cries,
And drink at My spring-head.”

“Seek those things which are above.” Another thing which is above, and it is in the Saviour: that is *His matchless love*. “Having loved His own which were in the world, He loved them unto the end.” He loved them on earth and He loves them now, seated at the right hand of God. It is everlasting love, and the mercy is it is love to sinners, and no-one can really comprehend its height and depth and length and breadth. But what a word is that: “To know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge.” It passeth knowledge, and yet it can be known. I know that seems a contradiction and a mystery. I take it, to put it simply as an illustration, a tiny child cannot understand anything about electricity, what it means, but that little child knows if he presses the switch, the light comes on. The love of Christ passeth knowledge, but it can be known – known by experience, known by tasting. The love of Christ can be known. It is one of those things which are above, and we are to seek it. It is to have an interest in it. “Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

“Seek those things which are above.” Another thing is *everlasting life*. We all have to die, but there is such a thing as everlasting life, and it is one of those things above. It can be found, because He who sits at the right hand of the Father once said, “I am the Resurrection, and the Life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. Believest thou this?” I find that in the New Testament, two things are always joined together: *the knowledge of Christ and everlasting life*.

“Seek those things which are above.” But there are so many. Perhaps more important than all, all those things which are bound up with the sin-atoning sufferings of our Lord Jesus. You may say, “Well, are those

the things that are above?” The Saviour died on earth. He shed His precious blood on earth. But its efficacy is known in heaven. Like the high priest under the law, when he went into the holy place, the sacrifice had been offered, the blood had been shed, but he carried the blood into the holiest of all, the representation of heaven, and he sprinkled it on the mercy seat for the sinner’s acceptance.

Well, all these things – pardon, forgiveness, acceptance in the Beloved, all those blessings which flow from the cross, all those blessings that your soul needs. “What is it to be blessed indeed?” Surely, surely these things are worth seeking, and it is the Lord Himself who tells us to seek them. And if the Lord tells us to seek them, surely the implication is a promise that you as a sinner shall find them, for they that seek shall find. It is God’s own word. “He is faithful that promised.” We might speak of many, many other things – perhaps you can think of them, things which are above – but the point is, they are all to be found in this glorious Person, once crucified, now sitting at His Father’s right hand.

“If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.”

* * *

How sweet to wait upon the Lord,
While He fulfils His gracious word;
To seek His face, and not in vain,
To be beloved, and love again!

To see, while prostrate at His feet,
Jehovah on the mercy-seat;
And Jesus, at the Lord’s right hand,
With His divine atonement stand!

“Father,” He cries, “I will that these
Before Thee on their bended knees,
For whom My life I once laid down,
Be with Me soon on this My throne.”

Amen! our hearts with rapture cry,
May we with reverence look so high;

Ascended Saviour, fix our eyes,
By faith upon this glorious prize!

With this delightful prospect fired,
We'll run, nor in thy ways be tired;
And all the trials here we see,
Will make us long to reign with Thee.

J. Swain