

Seek the Things That Are Above

by John Piper

This sermon emphasizes the importance of seeking the realities that are above, focusing on five key spiritual truths: the reality of God, Christ seated at the right hand of God, our hidden life with Christ, the future appearance of Christ, and our future manifestation in glory. It calls for a mindset shaped by these truths and a pathway of relentless seeking to align with these heavenly realities.

Scripture: Colossians 3:1, 1 John 3:14, Titus 2:13, 2 Corinthians 5:7, Philippians 2:5, Romans 8:34

Topics: "Heavenly Mindset", "Seeking Spiritual Realities"

Description

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Transcript

You are our life, Lord Jesus. We have died, we have been raised, and our life is hidden with Christ in God. When you, Christ, appear, who is our life, then we will appear with you in glory.

Make these words plain and powerful, transforming to us now. In Jesus' name I ask it. Amen.

You may be seated. My college years began 55 years ago, fall of 1964. My seminary days began 51 years ago, 1968, and I mention that because looking out on you reminds me of the remarkable hope and excitement I felt in those days at Wheaton College and Fuller Seminary, and I thought what an amazing thing it is that for most of you students, not all of you, but most of you, there is 50 years in front of you.

Amazing. Aren't you amazed? You have 50, perhaps, years of ministry in front of you. Life.

And then I think of the thousands and thousands of ideas that are going to come at you during those 50 years. Ideas about what is real, real, and you'll have to decide what's real, and ideas about how your mind should be shaped by what's real, kind of disposition or mindset you should have, and ideas about what's the path into the mindset that accords with what's real, and ideas about the kind of life that should flow from the mindset that accords with what's real. Ideas, some of them just rippling along under your boat, barely noticeable, and other ideas that are going to be like waves so big they will threaten to capsize your life.

And then I think, what should happen at Bethlehem College and Seminary? What should happen? What should happen in chapels like this? What can we do together so that you, for those 50 years, see reality? See reality for what it is and are shaped in your mindset by what is real, most real, and know the pathway to pursue it and the obedience that flows from it. What can we do? One answer is we can point you to some of those great realities that God has revealed, great certainties. We can show you the mindset that God requires and enables, and we can show you the path that leads to that mindset.

And maybe, if that happens, in 50 years from now, you'll be finding more and more discoveries of reality that you hadn't seen before in God's Word, and maybe you'll be standing before a group of students, thrilled with thankful and joyful memories of these days, and help them see reality and be shaped by reality and know the path into reality. So, Colossians 3, 1 to 4 is the pulling back of a curtain so that you can see reality, unbelievable reality, and literally unbelievable without a miracle of the Holy Spirit. You won't believe this.

You will not believe what's here without the miracle of the Holy Spirit in your mind and heart. Realities here are so astounding that if you see them and if you're shaped by them, you will be pervasively and radically different than people around you who don't see these things. It shows you a new kind of mindset.

It shows you a pathway into the mindset that accords with reality, and it shows a path of obedience beginning in verse 5 through the end of verse 6, chapter 4, which I will not touch. I'll leave it to Dudeney in a couple of weeks and others. So, we're going to focus on the realities that are here, the mindset that is shaped and conformed by the reality, and the appointed pathway in the pursuit of that mindset and those realities.

That's where we're going. I'll read it again. If you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above.

Seek the realities that are above. Where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God, set your minds on the realities, the things that are above, not on the things that are on the earth. For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, you also will appear with him in glory. So first we focus on the astounding realities here. I see five, at least.

I'm combining some to make it five, and manageable in the time. And then we'll focus on the mindset, and lastly on the pathway to the mindset. So let's talk about reality.

Number one. First and most foundational reality revealed in this text is the reality of God. Verse 1, second half of the verse, seek the things that are above.

Where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Verse 3, you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. Without the objective, external, self-existent reality of God, nothing in these verses is real.

It's all religious make-believe, and you need to know that in Paul's day and in our day, many religious people in churches make their living by playing religious make-believe. Life is vastly more complex, more complicated than the division between atheists and theists, because there are thousands and thousands of theists who don't believe in God. They believe in the idea of God.

They believe in the power of myth, and the God myth is the most powerful myth of all. It can change your life. Thousands of pastors, call them liberal, progressive, modernist, postmodern, doesn't matter, call them what you like, don't believe that your idea of God needs to correspond with anything objective outside of you.

What matters, they would say, is that your idea of God must have a good effect on your life. If it does, that's all that matters. It must be good for the world.

Religion is valuable. Myth is beneficial. The idea of truth is useful if it helps you be a healthy and tolerant person.

But when Paul says in verse 1, Christ is at the right hand of God, and in verse 3, your life is hidden with Christ in God, he does not mean that Christ is at the right hand of an idea, or that your life is hidden with Christ in an idea. The God of Colossians 3 is the same God as chapter 1. He's the creator of all things, verse 16. He was there before anybody had an idea of whether he was there.

He's the creator of every human mind, even those that think he is unreal. He is objective. He's external.

He's self-existent. He has an uncreated image of himself. His son, he calls him in 115, his beloved son, in whom the fullness of deity dwells, and by his son he's holding everything in existence, verse 17, and this son was sent into the world to bear the punishment of his people, 114, 214.

He's not an imaginary God. This world is the creation of God, and it's not imaginary either. So the first reality of verses 1 to 4 that is revealed is that here and all of Scripture, the most fundamental reality we deal with is God.

The second reality revealed in these verses is Christ seated at the right hand of God. Verse 1, second half of the verse, seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. So here's the eternal loved son from chapter 1, verse 13.

He once was dead, chapter 2, verse 12. He's now alive, chapter 2, verse 12, raised from the dead, and Paul says three positional things about him. One, he's above.

Two, he's at the right hand of God. And three, he's seated. He's above.

Now that means not just above the clouds and not just above some stars and some space. He's absolutely above this created order. But there's a mystery, isn't there? Because just as the incarnation was the penetration of the divine into the realm of the created, the ascension of the God-man is the penetration of the created into the realm of the divine.

It's a great mystery. He is at the right hand of God as God and as working for God. He is the God-man, absolutely above the created order and yet an interpenetration of the created order and the divine order because that's who he is.

He is at the right hand of God, place of honor, highest honor, highest dignity, highest power, highest authority. He's not below God. He's not above God.

He's at the right hand of God, acting as God, God acting through him, beautifully described in chapter 1 verses 15 to 19. Peter describes that place as the place of absolute power. He says, this is 1 Peter 3 22, he is at the right hand of God with angels, authorities, powers having been subjected to him.

So at the right hand of God, everything is under his feet. And Paul says that place has endowed him with the power of intercession for us. Romans 8 34, he is at the right hand of God, indeed interceding for us.

And he is seated. His great, decisive, saving work is finished. Hebrews 1 3, after making purification for sins, after it is done, finished, complete, he sat down at the right hand of the majesty on high.

Christ is above, Christ is at the right hand, Christ is seated. The third reality Paul unveils is that as a believer in Christ, your death is behind you. It has already happened, and your life is not what the world thinks it is.

It's hidden from the world. Indeed, it's hidden from you. With Christ in God.

So that's the reality. Death behind you, your life hidden from the world, from you. What you see in the mirror is not your life.

It is with Christ in God. Verse 3, you have died. So the worst is behind you, no matter how much you must suffer in this life.

Verse 1, you have been raised with Christ. The resurrection that you await is as sure as the one you have already experienced. Verse 3, second half of the verse, your life is hidden with Christ in God, as secure as the union of the Father and the Son, infinitely glorious and secure, but not yet manifest.

It is hidden. Now, the reason I said all of this reality is for you as a believer, not for everybody. Not everybody's life is hidden with Christ in God.

It's because of two words in verse 12, and I invite you to look at it. Chapter 2, verse 12. This verse, by way of parenthesis, is one of the main reasons I'm still a Baptist, having gone to three schools in which I wasn't necessarily encouraged to be one, especially the last one in Munich.

I was the only Baptist, and it was a sect, Baptist or sect. This verse they could not answer, not to my satisfaction anyway. You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith.

It's not your parents' faith. In the powerful working of God, who raised him from the dead. So baptism signifies, by immersion in water and the coming up out of the water, I'm standing on that pool right here, it signifies that we died, we were buried, we rose, and Paul makes explicit that the internal instrument of the Holy Spirit that unites us to Christ, so that that reality of death and rising is our reality, is through faith.

It isn't the water that did that. It isn't the priest who did that, and it isn't your parents who did that. By faith, we are united to Christ so that we died and we rose when he died and he rose.

One of the greatest realities in the universe is that you, and every believer, you have passed from death to life. First John 3.14. The most terrible experience of death is behind you. Your most glorious experience of life awaits you.

No matter how horrible the suffering and death that awaits you, it is nothing compared to what lies behind you. No matter how ecstatic this life may prove to be for you, it is nothing compared to the life that is hidden with God in Christ, ready to be revealed when he comes. Getting a hold of this reality, being held by this reality, is utterly crucial for your survival as a Christian.

You won't be a Christian without this reality. You'll become a legalist without this reality, or an unbeliever. It's essential to thriving in the ministry to others.

Two great glories bracket your life. They hold up the pain, the frustration, the ambiguities, the uncertainties. Say that again.

Your life is bracketed by two great realities, and in the middle here, pain, frustration, ambiguity, uncertainty. Behind you is the glory that your death is over. It's over.

You've died. It's over. And in front of you, above you, is the glory that your life is absolutely secure in God with Christ, will be revealed in glory when he comes.

Those are the brackets that hold the hiddenness. That's such an important word. We pass over it too quickly.

Verse 3, middle of the verse, your life is hidden. You can't see it. It's not in the mirror, that's for sure.

Nobody can see it. It's hidden. The glory is hidden.

Your death with Christ is hidden. Your resurrection is hidden. The true you, the true life of your soul is hidden, more glorious than your present life.

When you taste that life, you will say, I scarcely ever knew life. I just did a funeral an hour ago, trying to dress like this, and I said, Paul said, we're at home with Christ when we die, and most of us feel like we're very at home here, right here, at home in my skin, at home at BCS, at home in Minneapolis, at home with my wife. And I said, one instant at home with Jesus, and you will know you've been in a foreign land all your life.

Your life is hidden. This is not your life. This is not your life.

We walk by faith and not by sight, 2nd Corinthians 5, 7. To be sure, faith has its seeing, right? 2nd Corinthians 4, 4. Faith sees, but the sight of faith is not the kind of sight that removes hiddenness. Our life is hidden, and may God grant you to see that what you can't see is more real and precious than all that you can. Number four, the fourth reality Paul unveils in Colossians 3, 1 to 4, is Christ is going to appear.

Verse 4, when Christ, who is your life, appears, Christ is here now in this room. He's reigning over the world now, pervasively, completely. You can't lift your finger without Jesus Christ now.

Donald Trump can't paste one hair in place without Jesus. Brexit will happen, or not, according to Jesus. I will live to the end of this message, or not, by the will of Christ.

He's here, totally in charge in this room and in this world. But, it's hidden. His power is hidden.

His presence is hidden. You can't see it. It's like the wind.

You don't know where it comes from, where it goes. And Paul is saying in this verse, it will not always be so. The hiddenness is going to come to an end.

And all those who thought all that matters is our ideas of God, all that matters is the power of myth and the pleasures of imagination, they're going to cry out to be hidden from the wrath of the Lamb when mountains and rocks fall upon them. Real, real rocks, real mountains, not imaginary ones. They will want realness to

crush them to death to avoid the wrath of the Lamb, because it's real, and they'll know it too late.

The appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, Titus 2.13. He is coming. He will appear. All the hiddenness of this present life will no longer be hidden.

Finally, number five, the fifth reality is your hiddenness will also be over as well. You will appear with him in glory. Verse four, when Christ who is your life appears, you also will appear.

You're invisible right now. Nobody can see you. Your life is hidden with Christ in God.

Nobody can look at you and see you. You can't see yourself in front of the mirror. The true you is invisible.

You will be manifested. So Jesus says, for sure, let your light so shine before others that they may see your good deeds and give glory to your Father in heaven. Then they can see, they can see my life and give glory to my Father in heaven.

Nobody did more good deeds than Jesus Christ. Nobody did more God-manifesting, glory-revealing deeds than Jesus, and how many people saw it? A little tiny handful, and the rest killed him. There's no reason you should expect any better.

None. Think it not strange when the fiery ordeal comes upon you? It's not strange. It's part of hiddenness.

It's part of hiddenness. He was hidden from their eyes, and you are hidden from their eyes. And so, a handful.

Here and there, somebody might see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven, but most won't. So yes, by all means, let us seek to reflect the glory of God now. We must.

We're told to do. Jesus says to do that. But what a defeated and hopeless life we would live if we think this is my real life.

This is the measure of holiness. This is the measure of purity of my life. This is the measure of God-wardness.

This is the measure of joy. This is the measure of glory. This is the real me.

It's not. That's not the real you. When Christ, who is your life, is your life, the creator of your life, the sustainer of your life, the redeemer of your life, the owner of your life, the pattern of your life, the treasure of your life, when he appears, and only when he appears and is manifested from his hiddenness, will it appear who you really are.

And you will shine like the sun in the kingdom of your Father. As T.S. Lewis said, we will be tempted to worship each other, except we will be sanctified. So we won't worship each other, though we will look like gods, because we will be children of God in fullness.

Those are the five realities. God, Christ seated at the right hand of God, your risen life hidden in God and your death behind you, Christ coming out of hiddenness, and you coming out of hiddenness, shining like the sun. Second, there's a mindset that we are to have shaped by this reality.

Verse two, set your minds on things that are above, on realities that are above, not on things that are on the earth. I think the things that are above in this verse are what I've been talking about for the last 25

minutes. These five realities are the things that are above, not on things that are on the earth.

The things that are on the earth are any ideas or behaviors or institutions in this world not rooted in and shaped by these realities. And Paul spells them out in verses five and following. He says, take them off.

Take them off. Here's the problem with translating Paul's words with set your mind on. There's a problem with translation like that.

You don't need Greek to know the problem. It helps. It really helps here.

But English readers who just pay attention to context will solve 99% of the problems that we think Greek solves. Sophroneo is a loved word by the apostle. He loves this word group.

We don't have anything like it in English. That's the word translated set your mind on, phonate. That exact word, exact form of the word is used in Philippians 2.5. Let this mind be in you, which is also in Christ Jesus.

How different is that than set your mind on the mind that is in Christ Jesus? This is a call to have a mind, to have a mindset, to have an attitude set, to have a disposition, to have a set of inclinations and preferences in your entertainment and your clothing and everything else you experience in life. Have a mindset shaped by five realities. That's what he's saying.

Be shaped in your mind and your attitude, your longings, your desires. The problem with translating it as set your mind on is this. You can set your mind on something and disagree with it.

You can set your mind on something and not like it. Believe me, Paul doesn't mean that. When he says set your mind on these realities, he doesn't mean and you can take them or leave them.

No, be shaped, have a mind formed by these realities, not by television, not by movies, not by social media. Get your mind shaped and formed by real things, real reality. That's why the school exists.

God, Christ seated at the right hand of God, your true life hidden with Christ in God, death behind you, spectacular public appearance of Christ and you're appearing with him in glory. Let it shape the way you see the world, shape the way you think about the world, shape the way you feel about the world. That's what verse two means.

Get a mindset that accords with these realities. Last point. The pathway.

There's realities, there's the mindset, there's the pathway that he calls us onto in the pursuit of that mindset and it's found in verse one. If then you have been raised, seek. Now that's an active verb.

Seek the things that are above. Seek these realities. Seek them.

That's the pathway to the mindset. Seek them, pursue them, chase them, track them down, seize them, hold on to them, gaze at them, dig into them, understand them, taste them, savor them, treasure them. It's not passive.

No one gains the mindset of heaven passively. It doesn't happen. You seek it or you don't have it.

However, beware. The only seeking that succeeds is the seeking by those who are dead. The only seeking of life hidden with Christ in God is the seeking by those whose life is hidden with Christ in God.

You're not seeking to make the death or the life happen. You're seeking because they have happened. Look at verse three.

Can it be plainer? You have died. Seek. You're not seeking to die.

You're not seeking conversion. You're not seeking regeneration. It's over.

You're not seeking resurrection that happened when Jesus rose. It's over, finished, done, complete, behind you. Seek.

Those are the only kinds of seekings that succeed. The others are hopeless. You're not seeking your resurrection.

You have been raised. Verse one, you have been raised. Verse three, you have died.

So you can't seek to be raised. You're already raised. You can't seek to die with Christ.

You've already died with Christ. So seek the realities that are above. You have died.

You're raised. These are the basis of your seeking, not the object of your seeking. This is the very essence of Christian effort.

Oh, how much confusion reigns in the church over Christian effort. Seek means effort. Up in the morning early seeking, noontime seeking, supper time seeking, evening seeking, going to bed seeking.

I'm seeking the things that are above because I'm alive. I'm dead with Christ, alive with Christ. My life is hidden with Christ in God.

I'm after him because the seeking is the evidence and proof you're alive. It's the proof you're dead. It's the proof your life is hidden with Christ in God.

You're coasting. Don't count on anything. Seek.

Seek. We seek, we crave, we pursue the realities that are above because we are above. So let me say it again.

The pathway into the mindset shaped by the reality of these verses is the pathway of relentless, passionate seeking. Seek the realities that are above. They are found in the Word of God.

Colossians chapter 3. And all over the Bible, all over the Bible, glorious realities worthy of 50 years of passionate seeking. I'm 73. Nothing thrills me more than seeking the treasures of this book and telling people about them.

You never come to the end. You never get to the bottom. You never get to the top.

Seek. Seek. Seek.

What golden years you are in right now. Precious years. Don't waste these years playing video games or whatever you do to waste your life.

Don't do that. Give yourselves to this seeking. Don't be passive.

Find them, meditate on them, treasure them until your whole way of thinking and feeling and responding and acting is shaped by reality. You're growing up in a world that's so committed to shaping your reality. If you don't take this word seek and give yourself to it, here your little boat with those thousands of ideas rolling under it every day will not survive.

God, Christ seated at the right hand of God, your life hidden with Christ in God and your death behind you, Christ appearing in glory out of the hiddenness and you're appearing with him shining like the sun. Those five realities are more real than anything in the world. Let's pray.

Father I beg of you that for the years or minutes I have left and for the time, the years, the 50 years that these students and others have left we would not be conformed to this world but be transformed by seeking the realities that are above. Shape our mindset so that what we love and what we prefer is in accord with these glorious truths, these realities I pray in Jesus name. Amen.

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