

# The Things That Are Above

by J.R. Miller

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*The Christian's life should be guided by the principles of the heavenly life, such as love, truth, and honesty, even in our daily tasks and duties.*

**Scripture:** Colossians 3:1

**Topics:** "Spiritual Transformation", "Heavenly Living"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the call for Christians to live a risen life by setting their hearts and minds on heavenly things, as taught by Paul in Colossians 3:1-2. He illustrates that while we live in an earthly existence, we are to embody the values of heaven, such as love and truth, in our daily lives. Miller uses the metaphor of a caterpillar transforming into a butterfly to depict the spiritual growth and higher calling of believers. He reassures that even mundane tasks can be sacred when done with a heart aligned to God's will. Ultimately, he encourages believers to seek the things above, where Christ is, and to trust that God will perfect their efforts in this journey.

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## Transcript

"Since you have been raised to new life with Christ, set your hearts on things above! Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things!" Colossians 3:1-2

Paul reminds us that those who believe on Christ--should live a risen life. He says, "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is." We live on the earth at present. We walk on earth's streets. We live in material houses, built of stones, bricks, or wood. We eat earth's fruits, gathering our food from earth's fields, orchards and gardens. We wear clothes woven of earthly fabrics. We adorn our homes with works of art that human hands make. We engage in the business of earth. We find our happiness in the things of this life.

But there will be a life after this! We call it Heaven. We cannot see it. There is never a rift in the sky, through which we can get even a glimpse of it. We have in the Scriptures hints of its beauty, its happiness, its blessedness. We know it is a world without sorrow, without sin, without death. Paul's teaching is that the Christian, while living on the earth, ought to begin to live this heavenly life.

One day a friend sent me a splendid butterfly, artistically mounted, known as the Lima Moth. This little creature is said to be the most beautiful of North American insects. Its color is light green with variegated spots. In its caterpillar state, it was only a worm. It died and entered its other or higher state, as we would

say, and then the worm became a splendid butterfly.

This illustrates the two stages of a Christian's life. Here we are in our earthly state. After this will come the heavenly condition. "The things that are above" belong to this higher, spiritual life. But the Christian is exhorted to seek these higher things--while living in this lower world. We belong to heaven, although we are not yet living in heaven.

We have it in one of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer, "May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." The prayer is that we may do God's will not merely when we get to heaven--but now, while we are on the earth, as the holy ones who are in heaven do it. The law of the heavenly life, is to be the law of God's children in this world. We are to seek the things that are above, where Christ is.

Paul presents the same truth in another form, when he says, "Our citizenship is in heaven." We are in this earthly world--but we do not belong here. We are only strangers and pilgrims.

We might travel abroad. We visit cities, looking upon beautiful things, mingling with the people of other lands, charmed by what we see--but we are only tourists. Something tugs at our hearts continually, it is 'home'. So while we still live in this world we are citizens of heaven. Christ is our King. We owe him our allegiance, our obedience. We are to seek the things that are above, where Christ is. We can conceive only dimly of the things that are above. Nothing that is unloving is found there. 'God is love', and only love can live where God is.

The thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is a little earthly vision of some things that are above. It tells how the inhabitants live together. "LOVE is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails." Love is one of the things that are above where Christ is, which we are also to have here.

TRUTH is another. The Scriptures say, "He who utters lies shall perish." This means all kinds of lies; lies people tell with their lips, lies they tell in the work they do. One of the most dishonorable things that can be said of a man--is that he is not truthful. He is a liar. Nobody believes him. Nobody has any confidence in him. In the Book of Revelation, we read of certain people who are shut out of heaven, and among these are all liars. Even in this world a liar is shut out of every place in which honorable men gather. Falsehood is always contemptible. On the other hand, truth makes a man honored.

There are certain names which shine bright and fair after centuries, because they are synonyms of truth and honesty. The finest violins in the world are those which were made by Antonio Stradivari, who lived more than two hundred and fifty years ago. They were exquisitely beautiful. Stradivari was scrupulously careful in every smallest part of his workmanship, no more with what all eyes would see--than with what no one could see. He said he must always do his best--that if his hands slacked in any part of his work--he would rob God and leave a blot, where there should be good violins. His aim was that so long as

"Any master holds, twixt chin and hand, a violin of his--he will be very glad that Stradavari lived, made violins, and made them the best."

Shakespeare says, "The truest treasure mortals have, is spotless reputation." Reputation is won by what we do--and what we are in life. Spotless reputation must be, can be only, the harvest of honor and truth in

living. President Eliot named certain things which an honorable man cannot do, never does. "He never wrongs or degrades a woman. He never wrongs or cheats a person weaker or poorer than himself. He never betrays a trust. He is honest, sincere, candid, generous; not generous with money only--but generous also in his judgments of men and women." Reputation is made by the words and deeds of every passing day.

Truth is among the things that are above, where Christ is, which we, as Christians, should always seek in our present life. In saying that we should do the things of the heavenly life in this earthly life--we are not to infer that the common work of this world is unworthy. We use the words secular and spiritual, sometimes in a way that disparages what we call secular. We talk about the secular affairs of a man, as if they were not sacred, at least as if they were of a lower order than certain other kinds of work which we call spiritual. We need to guard ourselves carefully in making such distinctions, lest we do dishonor to people who do as holy and as worshipful service in their common, daily task-work, as they could do if their lives were devoted to spiritual service.

The New Testament says not a word against what we call secular business. Jesus did not ask that his disciples should be taken out of the world--he asked rather that they should stay in the world, and that they should be kept from the world's evil. It is as much a duty to earn one's daily bread--as it is to pray and to go to the Lord's Table. Work is a means of grace--it is idleness which draws a curse to itself. The holiest duties of earth, are oftentimes found in places which seem unheavenly. It is the heart that makes any service sacred or reverent. One may be a garbage collector, and please Christ better, get greater blessing, be a better citizen of heaven--than another who is a minister, busy with incessant duties.

We must never forget that the Son of God came to earth and spent thirty years in what we would thoughtlessly call secular work. While he worked at his carpenter's bench, his heart was in the holy of holies. He was in communion with the Father all the while he was toiling with the axe, hammer and saw. Let no one call the carpenter work of Jesus unholy--it was as pleasing to his Father as what he did later, when he went about healing, teaching and blessing the sorrowing.

When we seek to do the things that are above, where Christ is, most of us find the bulk of our occupation in common tasks and duties. Tomorrow we shall have to rise early, and go to our business, and there will be no dishonor, no irreverence in our most diligent devotion to these common tasks and occupations. We may please our Master just as well in these things that are given to us to do--as we please him on Sunday in specific acts of worship.

A mother among the very poor died, and left a little daughter with a heritage of love and sacrifice. She bade her to be kind to her father, who was a drunkard. She would often be abused, beaten by him, when he came home at night--but she was always to be patient and gentle with him. The other younger children were also confided to her keeping, and she was to do all she could for their comfort. She was wondrously loving and kind, living the lesson of love so beautifully, that God must have looked down with approval upon her sweet life. But she never could go to church or to Sunday school. There were some godly people who tried to get her to the church, and they told her that Christ would not be pleased with her--unless she would attend the services. Mary was frightened and feared that she should not be saved, for the care of the children and of her drunken father gave her no time for anything else.

Then one day, 'Mary' became very ill. Her body had been weakened by the care and toil, and she was unable to endure. She grew worse and worse, and the doctor said she could not live. One day Mary sent

for the playmate who lived across the street and said, "The doctor has been here, Katie. He says I'll never get any better. If it wasn't for one thing--I'm sure I'd just be glad. You know how it's been here, Katie--I've had so much to do I couldn't both mind the children--and go to the preaching, too. And now, when I see the dear Lord Jesus, what can I say?"

Then Katie, the little comforter, said: "Mary, just show Him your hands!" That was enough. The hands that had wrought so faithfully, would tell the whole story.

Going to church is a duty. Christ loves to meet us there. It is his appointment with us. Unless some other duty hinders us--we should never be absent. But in little Mary's case, it was impossible to do love's duty well in her place, and also attend the services of the church. "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is," meant for her doing the things of love in her own home. If you are needed to help others, to care for the sick, as doctors and nurses must do, to serve those who are suffering, or in trouble--do not be afraid if you cannot go to the church meetings. "Just show Him your hands!" The hands that serve and bless--are hands that are like Christ's hands; and the things of love--are things that are above.

It may seem an impossible life, to which this message calls us--but no divine command ever calls one to an impossibility. To enter the kingdom of heaven, is to begin to do the things of heaven here on earth. At first it will not be easy--but in doing the will of God we learn to do it better. When the master found his pupil sleeping for very weariness beside his unfinished picture, discouraged and sick at heart because he had not been able to do it as he wanted to do it, he took the brush and finished it with his own hand. So will our Master do for us--when we have done our very best and still have fallen short--he will add his own touch to it, and our poor efforts will appear in perfect beauty. Seek the things that are above where Christ is, and your life will grow here into the beginnings of heavenliness as the days pass, and at last when you reach glory you will find that you have the lesson full learned!

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