

LANZAROTE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP – 10/04/16

PREACHER: REV. ADRIAN HALLETT

READINGS: COLOSSIANS 1:15-23 & 2:1-5

A quick recap on last week – Colossian Christians were struggling to live out their Christian lives... wanted to change... wanted to live lives honouring to the Lord... all very positive – **BUT** – their desire for change made them vulnerable to false teaching. In their desire to change.... in their frustration and dissatisfaction with themselves, they didn't listen critically to those who came along and said, ' You're struggling – we can help. We've got the answers for you. Your faith in Christ is fine, as far as it goes, but you need more... you need Christ *plus*.... Christ *plus* asceticism.... or Christ *plus* mysticism.... or Christ *plus* enlightenment.... or Christ *plus* the law.... or Christ *plus* spiritual experience.

That's the issue Paul is addressing here in his letter to the Colossian church. Do you need anything in addition to Christ? Is it Christ plus, or is he all sufficient? That's the issue. And Paul is very clear on this... he says to the Colossian Christians, 'your faith is not deficient... you do not lack anything... you are complete in him...he is all sufficient. That's what Paul is hammering home in this letter – the supremacy of Christ (Col. 1:15-23) as was read earlier (sub heading in NIV is exactly that – 'The Supremacy of Christ').

That's why he goes on in Chapter 2 – our second reading (verses 1-5) to say that in Christ, '*are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*'. Everything you need for your Christian life ... everything that you need to live a life that honours him and equips you to serve him, is to be found in him and in him alone. It's not Christ plus – it's Christ and him alone you need. If all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are to be found in him, how futile to think in terms needing something more! He is all you need.

Everything is in place for you to become what you are in Christ... Paul has given them the teachings on Christ, on who he is and what he has done.... he's done the 'theology' with them, and then he moves onto the practical – live it out. Everything is in place for you... all has been done for you... all you need to live the Christian life is in place.... nothing more is needed, nothing more needs to be done – now live it out.

He's saying, 'you are a privileged people. You are in a relationship with the living God. There can be no greater privilege than that.... he has made it

possible for you to be in a relationship with him, now pursue it.... now nurture it... now develop it. Don't sit back and wallow in the privilege...go for it! And this is where Paul gives us the first key that we talked about last week: *'Since you have been raised with Christ, set your heart on things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God'...* or as other versions have it, *'If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God.'*

Slightly different, but the same emphasis. The 'if' in 'if you were raised with Christ' is not talking in terms of uncertainty, rather it is talking in terms of 'as' or 'since' you have – certainty – if you were raised with Christ, because you were raised with Christ, this will follow – *'set your heart on things above'...* *'seek those things which are above, where Christ is...'*

Because this has happened to you...because you have been *'raised with Christ'...* everything has changed. You are free... free now *'to set your heart on things above'...* free to *'seek after the things above, where Christ is'.*

I think we lose sight of the significance of this and the privilege that is ours as Christians. What is one of the major differences between a Christian and a non-Christian? What is one of the thing that marks out a true believer from a non-believer? To be able to *'seek after those things which are above'...* to be able to *'set our hearts on things above, where Christ is'.* A non-believer is incapable of doing that. It is totally impossible for him or her to do that. Their hearts are not set on things above, their hearts are tied to things of this world ... their thinking is shaped by the thinking this world... their reason for living is driven by what they can get out of this life....their whole being is dominated by the here and now – living for themselves, concerned with the pleasures of this world.... how to make their life more bearable.... tolerable.... pleasurable. Not wanting to think about *'things above'*, certainly not *'where Christ is seated at the right hand of God'* - too scary to contemplate! Better to lose myself in this pleasure.... this activity.... work hard, play hard, block it all out! Even those who think of themselves as 'spiritual' and not concerned with the things of this world are incapable of thinking like that – they may have other worldly thoughts and priorities, but they won't and can't think about *'things above where Christ is...'*.

Not so the Christian! You and I have been set free from worldly religions, worldly thinking, worldly passions – we have been set free to focus on him *'in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge'* – everything we need is to be found in him – why even consider going any where else?! What a privilege is ours.... the miracle of conversion!

So, says Paul, 'You are a privileged person... you have been set free to *'set your heart on things above... to seek things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God.* If you want your life to honour him... if you long to be more Christ-like, then focus on him.... *'seek things above where Christ is...'* If you want to be empowered to live the Christian life, *'set your heart on things above where Christ is..'* It's not Christ plus anything – it's Christ alone. You were raised with Christ, why seek salvation or fullness anywhere apart from him? Why go to broken cisterns when you can go direct to the fountain?'

'You have been raised with Christ'.... you have within yourselves the power of the resurrection.... you are united with the exalted Christ.... let that union transform your lives.... your mind and heart and will... 'Seek the things above where Christ is seated at the right hand of God'.

One final thought – the tense of the verb in the Greek is all important here – 'seek', or set your heart' – not a one off attempt.... not one attempt to focus on him so that we can say we have ticked that box. No, it's pointing to a persevering effort.... *go on seeking.... keep on setting your heart on things above... be consistently seeking.* And note this too, this is not a seeking to discover him – if you are born again by the Spirit of God you have already found him.... or to be more biblical, he has already found you. He sought *us* out... we are in a relationship with him, so it's not seeking to 'discover'.... it's a seeking to 'obtain'. Not seeking to discover, but seeking.... constantly... time and time again – to obtain.... to obtain all the riches available to us in and through the exalted Christ.

Seek, yes. But get the right emphasis... not on the seeking, but on the object sought... Christ alone, where our spiritual treasure is. The fruit of the Spirit are perfectly displayed in his life... he is full of joy...peace..patience...kindness... goodness... faithfulness.... gentleness and self-control. He's lowly... he's long-suffering... he's forgiving... he's generous... he's gracious. He is everything we would want to be. Focus on him, says Paul. Focus on his beautiful life.... seek him.... reflect on him.... be in awe of him... worship him – then there can be no room in our hearts for those worldly, fleshly passions and indulgences.

That's Paul's remedy to the Colossian Christians.... that's Paul's remedy to you and to me in our struggle to be more Christ-like. This is the first key he gives us to unlock the resources that are ours in Christ Jesus. It's not Christ plus anything... it's not Christ plus legalism... or the law... or rules... or regulations... or asceticism... or mysticism.... or enlightenment... or spiritual experience. It's Christ alone. All our spiritual needs are to be found in him and in him alone. We are complete in him!