

LANZAROTE CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP 17/4/16

TITLE: 'LIVING OUT THE RISEN LIFE' – KEY NO.2 ; 'Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things'.

READINGS: COL.2:13-23 & COL. 3:1-11

Just a quick recap on what we've covered so far – as if you needed it! Colossian Christians struggling to live out their Christian lives. Wanted to change...opened them to false teachers saying 'we can help'. Your faith in Christ is fine, as far as it goes, but you need more. Christ plus... Christ plus the law/enlightenment/asceticism/mysticism/spiritual experience'. That was what they were being told they needed to live out the risen life.... to lead the victorious Christian life.

'No', says Paul. 'It's not Christ plus anything – you have all you need in Christ - it's Christ alone', He warns the Colossians by saying '*See to it that no-one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends upon human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than Christ*' (Col. 2:8). Don't rely on broken cisterns when you can go to the fountain, Christ himself, '*In whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom & knowledge*' (Col.2:3). It's Christ alone that you need and he stresses that over and over again in different ways – just look again at the beginning of chapter 3 verses 1-11 and the number of references to Christ. Verse 1, '*Since then you have been raised with Christ...*' ... Verse 2, '*where Christ is seated at the right hand of God*'.... Verse 3, '*...your life is now hidden with Christ...*' Verse 4, '*When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory*'... and verse 11, '*...but Christ is all and is in all.*'

With Christ, where Christ is, with Christ, when Christ, with him....Christ is all. I think we get the message – we are complete in him! And that same passage gives us the keys that Paul hands to us all to live out the Christian life. He's done the theology, now he gets very practical, and it's these keys that we are now looking at. Last week, key number 1, '*set your hearts on things above*' (Col.3:1). This week, key number 2, '*Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things*' (Col.3:2).

What does it mean to *set you mind on things above, not on earthly things*? How do we do that? Do we need to go off to a monastery somewhere? Go off to a retreat regularly to have a spiritual top up as we withdraw from the world for a while. Does it mean that we should all become monks or nuns, or perhaps become Buddhists and sit around all day gazing at our navels until we attain

nirvana and the extinction of all earthly desires? As Christians, are we to withdraw from the world... have no practical involvement or concerns with the world in which we live? Of course not! That is not what Paul is talking about here. If we followed those ideas we would end up reinforcing the view that he is 'so heavenly minded he's of no earthly use' – the kind of pseudo-spirituality that gives Christianity and Christians a bad name.

The clue to understanding '*earthly things*' is to be found in verse 5, '*Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature*', and then Paul goes on to list a whole range of sins....'*sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry*'. That's what he's talking about here, '*whatever belongs to your earthly nature*'.... You used to live like that Paul says, '*But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other....* (Col.3:8,9).

In other words, don't focus on anything that belongs to your 'earthly nature'. If you have impure thoughts.... if you have evil desires.... if you're struggling with anger.... if you enjoy a bit of gossip and slander.... if you're struggling with these things.... if they are still prevalent in your life, then don't focus on them... don't keep dwelling on those impure thoughts.... don't keep dwelling on the way that person has hurt you which makes you so angry.... don't covet the next 'must have item' which stirs up greed and evil desire... if you struggle with lustful thoughts, don't turn on the adult channel on your TV. That's what Paul is getting at here – don't focus on things like that.... those sins of our earthly nature.... don't focus on earthy things, because doing so only strengthens sins grip.... doing so only drags you back into that way of living that you say you want to be free from.

That's the negative instruction from Paul, 'don't set your mind '*on earthly things*', rather, '*set your minds on things above*' - the positive instruction. Why? Because, quite simply, what dominates your thinking will determine your behaviour.... as a man thinks, so is he.

The mind is all important in the Christian life....the mind and true spirituality are inextricably linked in the N.T. But there are those in the church who teach against that.... who downplay the importance of the mind.... they take the view that our thinking can block the path to true spiritual experience.... they believe that we need to empty our minds to receive what God wants to give us.... that kind of approach was very much to the fore when the so called 'Toronto Blessing' was at its height. Not only is that view totally contrary to Scripture, it also follows that it is a very dangerous view. The Christian is told to '*test all things*'.... we are to use our minds, informed by Scripture, to protect us from

error and false teaching.... we are told that '*we will know the truth and the truth will set us free*' (John 8:32). How can we know the truth if we don't use our God given minds?

So Paul says, 'use your minds'..... '*set you minds on things above*'. Let me remind you of what we touched on last week – '*Since then you have been raised with Christ...*' In other words, something has happened to you.... you are not what you were... you are in this world but this world is not your home.... Paul says something very similar to the Philippian Christians....he talks of those who are '*enemies of the cross of Christ*' and goes on to say that '*Their mind is on earthly things*'. But, he says that's not true of the the Christian - '*... our citizenship is in heaven*' (Phil.3:18-20). That's where we belong....you're outside lives here, but your inside lives in heaven. We are free to be able to set our hearts on things above.... we are free to set our minds on things above, because that's where we belong.... that's our spiritual home.

He's not saying, 'now grit your teeth and start thinking of things above....', he's not saying, 'this is going to take a monumental effort on your part to start thinking like this because it's unnatural for you'.... he's actually saying, 'this is what has been made possible for you in Christ... it's not possible for the non-believer, but it is for you....this is in a sense inevitable for you... it follows on because you have been raised with Christ.... you are now free to be able to think of such things'..... '*things above, where Christ is...*'

Think of a compass for a minute. What does a compass do? What is the only thing it can do? The needle is always and inevitably drawn to point to the north..... it can't do anything else.... it can't help itself. Maybe that helps us get a hold of what Paul is getting at here. We're a bit like a compass in that we are now inevitably drawn to the heavenlies... we don't have to force ourselves.... it's natural.... it's inevitable because that's where we belong. So, says Paul, set your heart.... set your mind on where you belong.

It's very significant that Paul is talking of setting your heart on things above and then, in the next verse he says, 'set you minds on things above'. He's talking of our affections and our thinking. Let me give you an illustration here which I hope helps us understand the natural link between the two.

Bear with me and let me tell you briefly about when I was courting Hazel – it is relevant, I promise you! Our courtship was slightly unusual, and the more I thought about it, the more I thought it might help us understand what Paul is getting at here. At one point, before we were engaged, Hazel spent six months in Germany... a commitment she had made before we got 'serious'. So there she

is in Germany and there I was in Sale, Cheshire, hundreds of miles apart. I missed her dreadfully (and she did me, I'm pleased to say!)... she had stolen my heart. I wasn't the same person... something that had happened to me...for the first time in my life was free to be concerned with somebody other than myself. She was in Germany, I was in England, and there was a sense in which I was a German citizen, because that was where my heart was. My outside was in England, but my inside was in Germany. It wasn't an effort to set my heart on her... she already had that, and what followed on was that I couldn't stop thinking about her... I wrote letters to her (no emails or text messages in those days!) and she wrote letters to me. I couldn't wait to hear back from her... I read her letters over and over again... I was thinking about her every minute of every day... it wasn't an effort to set my mind on her... I couldn't help myself... it was just natural... inevitable... the one followed the other (affections and thinking!).

Although we were apart, we grew closer and closer together... I got to know her better and better as we shared more of ourselves with each other... I got to know what she liked and didn't like... and knowing her better, I became more and more determined to say and do things that pleased her. I couldn't bear to be separated from her... I was wanting to spend the rest of my life with her. I didn't want to let go of her, and she didn't want to let go of me. Maybe we'd even get married! All that was in 1966; we got married in 1968, and here we are, still together after 48 years of marriage!

Another imperfect illustration, but it might just help us to understand what Paul is getting at... to appreciate more fully this second key he gives us to live out the risen life. We're in Lanzarote, he's in heaven, but heaven is our 'home' is now. Something has happened to us... *'Since you have been raised with Christ'*, he's captured our hearts... we are not the people we once were... *'Our citizenship is in heaven'*, but we're not there yet! We are not there physically, but we are now free for our minds to be set *'on things above'*. Our outside lives here in Lanzarote, but our 'inside' is in heaven.

The Greek word for 'set your minds on ' is a difficult concept to fully convey in English, but it contains within it not just 'thinking', but a thinking that leads to a change in behaviour. We have been set free so that we are able to think about *'things above where Christ is...'*, (the unbeliever just can't do that – it is impossible for him)... but we can, and the more we focus on him, we get to know him better and better. How do we do that? We read God's love letters to us... we read the Scriptures... we get to know him... what pleases him... what displeases him... we get to know ourselves... what needs to change in us..... as our love for him deepens... as we think about him more and more, our thinking

leads to a change in behaviour. We want to live our lives in such a way that please him... that honour him... that brings glory to his name. We don't want to be separated from him... we want to spend the rest of our lives with him... and the amazing thing is that that is what he wants too - he has promised never to let go of us.... *'Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you'* (.....) and we even have we have the marriage supper to look forward to as promised to us in Rev. 19!