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Sermon Study on Col. 3:1-4

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But it has come up in ours. It is now entirely too late to say, 'They believed in inspiration, and we believe in inspiration; that is all that is necessary.' No; unfortunately that is not all that is necessary now. Due to some regrettable teachings and publications it is now necessary to ask, What do you mean by inspiration? To what extent is the Sacred Record reliable? May one throw out portions of it and cast doubt on other portions at will?"

We wish we could have the whole of Dr. Dell's straightforward and forceful "Epilog" reprinted here. We do have enough space for the concluding paragraph: "I do believe, though, with the Washington pastors that there is a great deal more unity of belief on the subject of inspiration between the rank and file of United Lutheran Church pastors and people and the pastors and people of other American Lutheran bodies than would be suspected from certain semiofficial statements of the U. L. C. A. It is only with the purpose of strengthening that real unity and bringing it out into the open beyond all camouflage that these words are written."

TH. ENGELDER

Sermon Study on Col. 3:1-4

Eisenach Epistle Selection for Ascension Day

*If ye, then, be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth, vv. 1, 2. "If ye, then, be risen with Christ." The if does not denote any uncertainty, but from the certain fact of their resurrection with Christ, chap. 2:12, their quickening together with Him, 2:13, Paul draws certain necessary inferences and conclusions. They have risen, *συνηέροθητε*, have been raised with Christ. The aorist describes this act of God as definitely accomplished. When did this raising with Christ take place, and what is the nature of this quickening? The apostle had answered both questions in the preceding chapter. In Baptism they had been buried together with Christ, 2:12. On the mystic union with Christ effected in and by Baptism compare such passages as Rom. 6:3 ff.; Gal. 2:27. Faith, which is engendered through Baptism, unites the believers with Christ, makes them members of His body, participants of the fruits of His burial and resurrection. Therefore the apostle had at once added that in Christ, united with Him, they had risen with Him, *συνηέροθητε*, were raised together with Him, "through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised Him from the dead," 2:12. (Note that Paul uses the same word, raised together, as in 3:1.) The same almighty power operating in the resur-*

rection of Christ was operative also in the engendering of their faith, in their regeneration by means of Baptism. This spiritual resurrection was possible only because Christ had blotted out the handwriting which had been against them, taking it out of the way and nailing it to the cross, v.14. There on the cross Christ finished the fulfilment of the Law which He had begun at the moment of His conception, had carried out during a lifetime of perfect obedience to every iota and tittle of the Law, and finally and forever had accomplished when the last penny of the sinners' guilt had been paid by Him, when the bitter cup of vicarious sufferings had been drained to the dregs, when after His triumphant shout of victory "It is finished!" He had bowed His head and given up His ghost on Calvary's cross. On the basis of this vicarious atonement God had been reconciled, and having forgiven all their trespasses (cp. 2 Cor. 5:19, the objective justification of the world), He had quickened the Colossians together with Christ, had through faith appropriated to them all the blessings earned by Christ, had made them partakers of a new life, a life no longer of death in sin and the uncircumcision of the flesh, but a life in and with Christ, a life of freedom from the wrath of God. This is a life spent in the blessed knowledge that they are now the beloved sons of God in whom He is well pleased; a life in which they serve God in holiness and righteousness, knowing that all imperfections and shortcomings have been blotted out on the cross of Christ. It is a life in which they need not fear death because they are united with Him who is the Resurrection and the Life. That is the blessed life into which they were raised when in Baptism they were quickened together with Christ, 2:13; 3:1. Now, if that is true, — and, thank God, it is true, — then the inescapable conclusion, the unavoidable obligation for every Christian is, Seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. In order to realize the full significance of these words, we must understand what is meant by Christ's sitting on the right hand of God.

There can of course be no doubt that Scripture very frequently uses the term "right hand" to denote the physical right hand of man. Yet there are many passages where this meaning cannot be intended. Take, e. g., Ps. 89:25. The hand of the Messiah, the true David, was to be set, placed, in or on the sea and His right hand on the rivers. That certainly does not mean that Christ's human, physical hand was so large that it could be set up in the ocean and at the same time on the rivers. (Note the plural.) The psalmist is thinking of a physical hand and arm of the Messiah as little as in v. 42, where he complains that God has set up the arm of the adversaries of His Anointed. In both in-

stances he uses the word in a figurative sense, that of power, sovereignty, government, lordship. The very first time this term is used in connection with God leaves no doubt as to its meaning. We read Ex. 15:6: "Thy right hand, O Lord, is become glorious in power; Thy right hand, O Lord, hath dashed in pieces the enemy." The right hand is merely the symbol of the glorious power of the Lord; for it was not the physical hand of God that overthrew the enemy, but as Moses immediately continues, as though to forestall any possible misunderstanding: "And in the greatness of Thine excellency Thou hast overthrown them that rose up against Thee." And in chap. 14:24 it was not the hand but the look of the Lord that troubled the Egyptians. It was that Lord, like unto whom there is none among the gods, who alone is glorious in holiness, fearful in praises, doing wonders, who stretched out His hand, and the earth swallowed them, 15:11, 12. He who is glorious in holiness, infinitely exalted above all His creatures, needs no physical hand, be it ever so strong, needs no physical arm, be it ever so powerful. He is not, like His creatures, dependent on physical eyes and ears and arms and hands. He is not hampered by a body, not limited by the laws of space or time. He is above all laws and limitations, the All-powerful, the Ever Eternal, the Ever Present One. For the New Testament usage of this term we need only refer to such expressions as the right hand of power, Mark 14:62; the right hand of the majesty on high, Heb. 1:3; the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, Heb. 8:1, and compare with this latter expression 1 Kings 8:27; Is. 66:1. See also 1 Pet. 3:22 and above all Eph. 1:20-22. There can be no doubt that in all these passages the Holy Spirit speaks not of a physical hand, but of the almighty, everlasting, unlimited power, majesty, and sovereignty of God.

At this right hand of God Christ *sitteth*, ἐστὶν καθήμενος, is a Sitting One. This construction reminds us of the word of the Lord spoken before the Council of the Jews: "Hereafter shall the Son of Man sit on the right hand of the power of God," Luke 22:69, where the same construction is used, be a Sitting One. The present participle denotes the continued state of sitting, while the absence of the article stresses the qualitative force of the participle. Henceforth it shall be, says Christ, and it is now, says Paul, the distinguishing characteristic of Christ, the Son of Man, that He is one sitting at the right hand of Power. This is as true today as it was 1900 years ago when Paul first penned these words, and that describes Him as He shall be world without end. Now what does this mean?

Sitting on the right hand of God cannot mean a sitting in silent meditation, in quiet self-contemplation, in restful inactivity.

Christ has not entered heaven as a hermit enters his cave for the purpose of secluding himself and disassociating himself from the world. The word καθήμενος is the translation of the Hebrew word יָשָׁב, translated in the English Bible sitting or dwelling, and quite a common attribute of God, the Sitting One. God does not sit in heaven in order to have a place where He may conveniently forget about the world and let the world run its course as it may. The selfsame God that is sitting or dwelling above the cherubim is addressed Ps. 80:2 ff.; 99:1 ff.; Is. 37:16-20; of Him we read 1 Kings 22:19-23. Surely God sitting in heaven is not an idle God. He is Life; He makes use of His power, His sovereignty, His majesty, in ruling and governing the world. In like manner the sitting of Christ at God's right hand denotes, not a state of inactivity, but His participation in God's government of the world. This is the clear doctrine of Holy Writ. We need only call attention to passages which define His sitting at the right hand as holding in subjection angels and authorities and powers, 1 Pet. 3:20; or as making His enemies His footstool, Ps. 110:1; or which describe His exaltation, of which His session is an integral part, as the rule over all the world, Phil. 2:9-11. We point particularly to Eph. 1:20-22, where His sitting at the right hand is defined as His government over all things and as His omnipotent rule and lordship over His Church.

This sitting of Christ at the right hand of God cannot denote a localized sitting in a definite, circumscribed place in heaven. We have seen that according to Scripture the right hand of God is not a physical place, so that one sitting at the right hand cannot at the same time be at the left hand of God. No; God's right hand is His majesty and power, unlimited by time or space. Localizing Christ in heaven is tantamount to localizing the right hand of God, localizing God's power, God's presence, God's being, in opposition to Ps. 139:7-10; Jer. 23:23, 24. Localizing Christ's sitting at the right hand of God is also in direct contradiction to God's clear Word. Eph. 1:23 we are told that the Church, which is Christ's body, is the fulness of Him that filleth *all in all*, heaven and earth, the entire universe. Moreover, Christ Himself tells His enemies: "Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting," as a Sitting One, "on the right hand of Power and coming," as a Coming One, "in the clouds of heaven," Mark 14:62. He, the Sitting One (present participle), is the Coming One (present participle); the Coming One is the Sitting One. Neither sitting nor coming is to be localized. So they shall see Him coming while sitting, sitting while coming. How is that possible? His body, we say, is no longer the body of humiliation but a glorified body, Phil. 3:21, fully, and uninterruptedly making use of the divine omnipresence given to His

human nature when the Son of God received it into union with His person.

What a glorious Jesus is our Jesus! The Christ, the Anointed One, anointed without measure, more than His fellows, Ps. 45, 7, sitting on the right hand of God! That suckling in Mary's lap, that infant whom pious Simeon took up in his arms, that babe who fled into Egypt to escape the murderous sword of an earthly monarch, is now sitting at the right hand of the Majesty on high, the omnipotent Ruler of the universe, the almighty Head of His Church, placing all His power and majesty at the disposal of His body, guiding and protecting it with His mighty hand against all enemies, watching with never-sleeping eye and shielding with omnipotent loving-kindness every individual believer. He it is who is not ashamed to call us His brethren, Heb. 2:11 ff.; Matt. 28:10; John 20:17.

If, then, you are raised with this Christ, *seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.* Τα ἄνω, two small words, three syllables, five letters, yet they include all that heaven has to offer, all that Christ, the perfect Savior, in whom dwelleth the fulness of the Godhead bodily, has procured for mankind, all that He, sitting at the right hand of God, offers to His Christians as their almighty and gracious King. If these things are worth while, — and there is no Christian that will dare to deny that, — then there ought to be no need of any admonition to seek, to strive after, to endeavor to obtain and keep, them in one's possession. The apostle knew that Christians are not wholly spiritual, that there is ever present the Old Adam, their carnal nature, in which "dwelleth no good thing." Therefore he exhorts them, *Seek the things which are above, and continues, not merely repeating this admonition, but making it at the same time clearer and stronger: Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.* Φρονεῖν is a stronger term than seek, stronger also than the translation in our Bible. It means to set not only one's affection but one's entire heart and soul on a matter, to let one's whole mind, every thought and desire and consideration, be occupied with, and directed toward, the things above, not toward things on the earth. The apostle himself enumerates a number of the matters pertaining to this earth, vv. 5-8. The Old Adam is only too willing to run with the world into the same excess of riot, 1 Pet. 4:4; yet the new man will always direct his mind and thoughts toward that Christlike conversation described in vv. 10-17. In the chapter preceding our text the apostle had warned against some of the more subtle forms of seeking and minding earthly things. He had cautioned his readers against will worship, ἐθειλοθρησκία, 2:23, a self-willed worship, a form of service chosen by man's own will. An example of such self-chosen service is the

observance of certain days as a divinely commanded act, the abstaining from certain meats and drinks, 2:16, which forms of worship were at best shadows of things to come, earthly types, v. 17, rendered unnecessary since the body, the heavenly antitype, Christ, has come. Such a self-chosen worship is the voluntary humility, 2:18, 23, that sham meekness, which only too frequently is coupled with vain, puffed-up haughtiness, manifesting itself as soon as one contradicts their ability to penetrate into those things which they have not seen, on which Scripture is silent, which they claim to know to perfection; cp. 2:19. We think, *e. g.*, of millennialists of almost every type, of Christian Scientists, theosophists, etc. Such self-willed service is false asceticism, neglect of the body and its needs and requirements, vv. 21, 23, practised by so many self-styled saints. The world may regard such self-chosen worship as wisdom supreme, as true holiness. It may appeal to the natural religious feeling of man. Yet all such worship, like all service of sin, is of the earth, earthly, incompatible with the things above. Therefore a Christian will not be deceived and beguiled of his reward by their vain claims, 2:8, 18. He will not fall victim to their allurements, will not set his heart and mind on these things of the earth, but will direct his thoughts upward, heavenward, to the things above, where Christ sits at the right hand of God.

Seeking justification, occupying his mind with the salvation of his soul,—and a Christian knows of no matter more important,—a Christian will not look to earthly matters for salvation, to a righteousness of his own making. He will not trust in his own virtue, nor rely on his own character. He seeks salvation not on this earth but sets his heart and mind on things above, on that righteousness which Christ above has earned for Him; that garment of fine linen, clean and white, which the Lamb gives to all His followers, against which all other garments are as filthy rags; that righteousness which alone is accepted as perfect by God, since it is a righteousness which His own Son has purchased by His obedience and death.

Seeking sanctification of life, deliberating on ways and means to serve His God and Savior, again a Christian does not mind earthly things. He looks for information not to the sages of the world; he does not ask his own reason, does not work out a scheme of his own, to worship and serve the Most High. He relies not on his own strength to do the will of God. Nor is he discouraged because of the weakness of his own flesh and blood or because of the power and fierceness of the enemies opposing him. All that is of the earth, while his heart and mind is set on that which is above. He lifts up his eyes unto the eternal hills whence cometh his help. There, in heaven, sits Christ, his Savior, on the

right hand of God, Jesus, the Author and Finisher of his salvation, his Righteousness and Sanctification. Humbly he confesses: Rom. 7:18; yet more than conqueror through Christ that loved him, he defies all his enemies and exclaims: 1 Cor. 12:9 b; Phil. 4:13.

The Christian will find joy and satisfaction in the beauty of nature, in God-pleasing arts and sciences, in the happiness of family life, of friendship and Christian fellowship. He will faithfully perform the duties of his earthly calling and profession. Yet he remembers that, after all, these pleasures and duties pertain to the things of this earth, and he will never permit them to fill his heart and mind to the exclusion, the neglect, the slighting, of that heaven-born joy, that peace divine, which the redeemed soul has found in Christ Jesus, its heavenly Bridegroom. In Him the Christian is complete. For in Christ dwelleth the fulness of the God-head bodily, Col. 2, 9. Having Christ, can we ask for more? In Him the Christian finds the full satisfaction of every spiritual want. Seek Him! Set your affection, your whole heart and mind and soul, on Him alone! Is it not to be deplored that Christians are still in need of such an admonition? Alas for the weakness of our faith and life! Alas for the strength of the Old Adam in us, who constantly drags us down from the realms on high, from heavenly joy and peace and life, from the throne of God and Christ, into the dust and dirt of this earth, into its vanities, its sins, its self-righteousness, into the pride of flesh and the lust of eyes and the love of the world, which passeth away! *Sursum corda!* Set your heart and mind on things above!

That is not impossible, even if at times it seems a hopeless undertaking. To encourage his Christians, to strengthen them for their struggle against those matters mundane which would fill their heart, the apostle adds another reason for heavenly-mindedness.

For ye are dead, ἀπεθάνετε; for ye have died. Their resurrection with Christ (v. 1; cp. 2:12, 13) implied that they died with Christ. "Death annuls all obligations, breaks all ties, cancels all old scores." (*Expositor's Greek Testament* on Rom. 6:7.) Christ, as the apostle states, Rom. 6:10, died unto sin once, ἐφ' ἅπασι, once for all. While He lived, sin lay upon Him; He was burdened by its guilt, which was imputed to Him by His Father; He suffered the penalties of sin; He was craftily tempted by Satan. This relation to sin, which He had of His own free will assumed from the moment of His conception, ceased with death. He had died unto sin, had no longer any relation to sin. Its guilt was done away with, its penalties fully paid; its power to attack Him in futile efforts to seduce Him was at an end. Together with this Christ, the believers, one with Him in faith, have died unto sin when they united with Him in Baptism. Sin has lost its right to accuse them,

its authority to condemn them, its power to rule over them. They are freed from sin, Rom. 6:7, freed from its jurisdiction by the judicial sentence of the Supreme Judge. Their old sinful life and the things of this earth can influence them as little as all the riches and pomp and pleasures of this world can influence a man dead and buried. He is blind, deaf, dumb, dead, to all its lures and attractions. Of course, the apostle is speaking here of the Christian as a new-born, spiritual man, of his new nature. It is this new man, which constitutes him a Christian, to which he owes whatever spiritual power he possesses.

Paul does not carry out the thought of death to sin and things of the earth but hurries on to tell his readers more about the glorious life which was engendered in them when they became Christians. He had already told them that their life was intimately bound up with the life of the risen Christ. In Christ their spiritual life has its source and well-spring; from Him they daily draw new life and strength. Now he tells them that their life is *hidden*, the perfect denoting that the state of being hidden still continues. The apostle uses not βίος, the mode or manner of life, but ζωή, life as existence, as to its true nature. The manner of life, its manifestation, is not hidden, and should not remain hidden, Matt. 5:16; 1 Pet. 2:12. But its real nature, its well-spring, is hidden. We see the water gushing forth from the rock and hear it murmuring, babbling, as it flows over its stony bed; yet its origin is hidden deep, deep in the rock, invisible to human eye. We see the trees bud, the shrubs put forth their leaves, the flowers burst into glorious bloom. We can tell the difference between a dead plant and a living one; yet the life itself, which is so evident in its effects, is invisible, hidden, a deep mystery. That is true of the physical life of man, of his mental life, and especially of the spiritual life of twice-born men. What is that faith that makes a Christian so different in actions, words, thoughts, desires, from an unbeliever? Just what kind of power is it that enables a Christian to exclaim with Paul: Rom. 8:28-39; Gal. 6:14; Phil. 3:7 ff.; 4:12, 13? To natural man that seems folly and foolishness, superstition, hypocrisy, weak-mindedness, bigotry, *odium humani generis*, etc. And even to the believing child of God it is a mystery, hidden to his understanding, even though he feels the heart-throbs of this life within himself and is aware of the indwelling in him of the Triune God and His Spirit, Rom. 8:26 ff.

As long as we live in this world, our life as children of God is hidden *with Christ in God*. Christ, who as our Savior came upon this earth a true man, visible to his fellow-men, has now ascended on high, has removed His visible presence from man. He is now in God, the Omnipresent One. In this omnipresent, yet invisible

God, Christ now is, has His being. His life is in God, hidden, mysterious, invisible. We see His guiding hand in the history of the world, of the Church, of our own lives, and still His life, what is it? Where is it? What is its nature? What is the secret of its power? We cannot tell, human mind, mortal reason, cannot lift that veil behind which Christ's life in God is hidden. It is a life of a true human being, a spiritual life of perfect righteousness and absolute holiness. It is a life in God, entirely, essentially, intimately, united with God, completely absorbed in God and in things divine, a life that finds its bliss, its sole happiness, its life, in God.

With this Christ our life is hidden in God. Christians live in Christ. Though sitting at the right hand of God, He is not removed from His Christians, He is still united with them, dwells in their hearts. Their lives are part of His life, His life their life, Gal. 2:20. His life shall be in His believing followers a well of water, the sources and hidden springs of which are in Christ, in God, and which already here in this world bubbles forth into a living stream of good works and finally flows into everlasting life. This hidden life coming down from the throne of God brings a bit of heaven into this sinful earth. Christian homes, Christian communities, breathe indeed a spirit of Paradise, are vestibules of the mansions above. How much more like peaceful, happy Eden would this earth be if more homes, more communities, would give evidence of that life outlined by the apostle in his exhortation to manifest Christian heavenly-mindedness, chap. 3:10 to 4:6!

The aorist ἀπεθάνετε had called the attention of Paul's readers to "the accomplished act of dying" (Meyer), the perfect κέκρικται to "the continuous subsisting relation in reference to the present up to the *parousia*." (Meyer). Now he directs their hearts and minds to this future revelation of their hidden life.

When Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory. Note the absence of any connectives. *Repentina luce percellit*, says Bengel. The abruptness of speech startles by its sudden unexpected light. When, ὅταν, at the time that Christ appears, who is our Life (John 14:11; 6:33, 48-58), with whom our life is now hidden in God; at the time that He fulfils His promise (John 14:4; Acts 1:11), then, τότε, at that precise moment, shall ye also appear in glory. Ye, every individual Christian is addressed. Not only will the Church as a body appear in glory, so that our individual existence shall have ceased; no; ye, every single Christian, young or old, man or woman, shall then be manifested in glory. That Christ who is Resurrection and Life, with whom the Christian already in this life has been quickened, with whom every individual believer has been united in that

strange mystic union, that Christ will manifest Himself as Life, as the Life of His Christians, as our Life, by raising our mortal body, by reuniting the soul with the body, by glorifying us with the likeness of His own glorified body, 1 Cor. 15; John 17. Then it will become manifest to all — to us, to our fellow-saints, to the world — that our life already in this earth was life indeed, that our Christian assurance of spiritual and eternal life, based on the promise of our Savior, was not an idle fancy, not a man-made theory, doomed finally to die and be buried in that vast graveyard of theories discarded and hopes blasted. On that blessed day our life shall appear in its true nature, life in the fullest sense of the word, a life which is beyond the possibility of our present conception, a life in which we shall participate with Christ, our Life, in that heavenly life into which He entered when He ascended on High to sit on the right hand of God.

Our text with its wealth of thoughts suitable for sermons on Ascension Day again proves the mastery of the compilers of the Eisenach series in choosing passages appropriate to the occasion. It directs hearts and minds upward to the ascended Christ. After presenting the story of the ascension in the introduction, the preacher may choose for his theme, *Ascension Thoughts for Ascension Day*. Let us direct our minds and hearts to Christ's ascension, to our daily ascension (cp. Hymn 233:5; 236:2), to our final ascension. — *The Ascended Christ is All in All*. With Him we have died unto sin. With Him we are living in a heavenly life. With Him we shall appear in glory. — Though Christ has withdrawn His visible presence, He is with us and will be with us forever. *Manifestations of the Ascended Christ*. In the lives of His Christians. In the appearance on that Day. — Though in many respects there seems to be no difference between the lives of Christians and unbelievers, there is an essential difference. The unbeliever's life is of the earth, earthly. *The Christian's Life a Life in Christ*. 1) In Christ it has its hidden well-spring. 2) In Christ the Christian's life on earth becomes a heavenly life. 3) In Christ his life shall be manifested in glory. — *Seek Those Things that Are Above!* There is Christ, your Savior. There is the fountain of your strength. There you shall be forever with Christ. — The ascended Christ charged His Church, Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 1:9. What has our Church done during the past century? What are we doing? *Why do So Many Christians Take So Little Interest in Spreading the Kingdom of Christ?* Because we forget our enduring obligation to our King, our ever present strength in Christ, our future glory with Christ.

TH. LAETSCH