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## CANDIDATES SUNDAY SERMON

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### Look up! Look in! Look out!

#### Scripture Passages:

- Colossians 3:1-2 (*The Message*)

‘So if you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it. Pursue the things over which Christ presides. Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up and be alert to what is going on around Christ - that’s where the action is. See things from his perspective.’

- Colossians 3:1-2 (*NIV*)

‘Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.’

You may want to extend the Bible reading for use in worship. A reading from Colossians 2:20 to 3:4 will put the key passages above in context.

#### Key Focus:

- **What are you looking at?**

As followers of Jesus Christ, it is all too easy for our focus to be looking down, bogged down in the things of this earth, or perhaps distracted by what this world tells us we should have or achieve. What could happen if we changed our perspective - if our focus was no longer to look down but to ‘be alert and look up to what is going on around Christ’? How could our lives and the lives of those around us be transformed if we began to see things from his perspective?

#### INTRODUCTION

‘Look up!’ When things or situations look up, we usually understand this to mean that they increase in quality or value; if there is a person we look up to, this is someone we have respect for. Looking up means a change in how we view things or people and usually involves an improvement of some kind or a positive response.

- *Story* - There was once a young tourist who found herself fortunate enough to be exploring Manhattan in New York. After a long day of sightseeing, the traveller had the Empire State Building as the last place on her list to visit. Her eyes were glued to the screen of her phone, trying to make sense of the map and looking for the little blue dot which would tell her that she had reached her destination - but to no avail. She was hopelessly lost. In true tourist fashion, the woman hailed a yellow New York cab and, with a slight hint of desperation in her voice, wearily pleaded with the taxi driver to take her to the Empire State Building. The taxi driver looked somewhat confused

at this, so the woman frustratedly repeated the request. 'Please can you take me to the Empire State Building!' Calmly and with a smile on his face, the taxi driver pointed upwards. 'You were here all along!' he laughed. 'You just needed to look up.'

- In his letter to the Colossians, the church in Colossae, Paul is reminding the people there not to lose their focus or be distracted by the things around them, but to keep their focus on Jesus Christ and the things around him.

### CONTEXT

- Although there is some debate among scholars, the widely held view is that Paul was the author of the letter to the Colossians, possibly written around 55-60 AD.
- It is known as one of the prison letters because it is accepted, along with the letters to the Ephesians, Philippians and to Philemon, that Paul wrote this letter whilst in prison. In Colossians 1:24, Paul refers to his current suffering and mentions a fellow prisoner in Colossians 4:10.
- Colossae was a small town on the banks of the River Lycus in south-east Asia Minor (modern-day Turkey). It was not a particularly important place but was a fairly affluent town due to the trade in dying cloth.
- Because of this prosperous trade, there were people from many different cultures living and working there. This led to several different religious practices being observed and the lines between the different cults and religions often became blurred, including among the large proportion of Jewish people living and worshipping in Colossae.
- The church in Colossae was relatively young, mainly Gentile, and possibly established by Epaphras (Colossians 1:7) so it is unlikely that Paul had ever visited this church in person. However, Paul had become aware of difficulties in this fledgling church. There had been false teaching (Colossians 2:8) and questions about adherence to Jewish Law had been raised (Colossians 2:16-23).
- Within his letter, Paul attempts to develop the spiritual maturity of these new Christians as well as combat some of the false teaching and practices that have crept in. It is important to remember that this is a letter intended by Paul to be read out in church, so it needs to be understood in a corporate as well as individualistic way.
- Colossians 2 sets the backdrop for Paul's teaching, reminding the Colossians that they have been transformed, made alive in Christ. As people who have received Jesus Christ as Lord, he has authority over their lives, not the false teaching of others or the sins and behaviours of the past.



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- Nor are they bound by human rules of ‘which have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body’ (Colossians 2:23).
- Paul then moves on in chapter 3 to consider spiritual maturity in the light of this freedom in Christ.

### EXPLORATION

#### 1) Look up!

This idea of looking up and changing our perspective is a frequent message throughout the Bible.

- In times of trouble or difficulty, the Psalmist reminds us, ‘I lift up my eyes to the mountains - where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth’ (Psalm 121).
- When miraculously feeding the five thousand, Jesus keeps his focus on the Father. Mark 6:41 says, ‘Taking the five loaves and the two fish and **looking up to heaven**, he [Jesus] gave thanks and broke the loaves.’
- On each occasion, in times of blessing and challenge, the direction is upwards, towards God.
- Paul reminds the Colossians to do the same. They are being distracted by the demands of those around them, the teaching of other religions and ‘earthly things’ (3:2). Or as *The Message* describes it, ‘Don’t shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you.’
- In the Old Testament, as described in Genesis 15:5, God made his covenant with Abram, saying, ‘Look up at the sky and count the stars - if indeed you can count them.’ Then he said to him, ‘So shall your offspring be.’
- We look up and our focus is on God, our perspective is no longer restricted to the earthly things that distract us and we recognise that we are part of a much bigger picture. Not only does our perspective change when we look up to him, but our purpose does too.
- Going back to our lost tourist at the beginning of this sermon, if only she had looked up she would have seen the landmarks that would have given her a sense of location and direction. When we look up, look up to God, we find our purpose and direction.
- If you have ever sung in a choir or played an instrument in a musical group, you will know how easy it is to be absorbed by the printed music in front of you, focusing on your own part. However, if you want to know the tempo and volume you should be playing or singing, then you must lift your eyes to the conductor.



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- Music is transformed when we are playing together, led by the conductor. Our corps, centres and communities can be transformed when, together, we look up to follow God's direction.

### 2) Look in!

With the focus rightfully placed on God, looking up to him for our purpose and direction, we can see things from his perspective and allow ourselves to be continually transformed by him.

- *The Message* version of Colossians 3: 1-2 uses phrases like 'living this new resurrection life with Christ' and 'pursue the things over which Christ presides'.
- The *NIV* translation says, 'Set your heart on things above'; and the word for 'set your heart' literally translates as 'seek'.
- There is an active intentionality within the life of the believer when we try to see God's perspective on things. We don't simply look up as passive observers; we actively search for Christ and allow him to have lordship over our lives.
- Every aspect of who we are - every thought, aspiration and action - should be governed by Jesus Christ.
- We sing the words:
  - 'Over every thought, over every word,
  - May my life reflect the beauty of my Lord,
  - 'Cause you mean more to me than any earthly thing,
  - So won't you reign in me again.'

*Brenton Brown 1998 Vineyard Songs (UK/Eire)*

- That is the message of Colossians 3: 1-2: we seek the things above, the things of God and consequently live life with a different purpose and direction. But when we look up to the things of God, this demands that we look in towards ourselves and see those areas of our lives which need to come under his reign.
- This is the life of holiness, the journey of Christlikeness. *The Message* describes this beautifully in verses 3-4 of Colossians chapter 3: 'Your old life is dead. Your new life, which is your real life - even though invisible to spectators - is with Christ in God. He is your life.'
- Looking up helps us to look in.

### 3) Look out!

Paul's desire was not for the Colossian people to stop there. Living under the reign of God helps us to look up to the things of God, and look in to our new life with him.

- Paul then tells the church in Colossae to consider what the practical outworking of this might look like. Colossians chapter 3 gives lots of wise advice about how to live and how to behave as people focused on the things of God.
- Verse 17 encourage us to ‘Let every detail in your lives - words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way’ (*The Message*).
- If we live here and now with a heavenly perspective, we will no longer place importance on the things that the world places importance on.
- *Quote* - ‘Christians will view everything against a backdrop of eternity and no longer live as if this world was all that mattered.’ (William Barclay)
- So when we look outwards, what do we see? The amazing thing about lifting our gaze upwards is that it immediately widens the view.
- Changing our viewpoint to God’s viewpoint does not mean that we take ourselves out of the world or cease to be a part of it. In fact, the very opposite is true. Colossians 3:12-25 tells us how we should work out family, relationships, community, work, all from God’s perspective.

### CONCLUSION

So what are you looking at? On this Candidates Sunday, what is God’s perspective on your life?

- Maybe you are distracted by the things of this world, the challenges of life or the ambitions and achievements that dazzle. It is so easy to lose our way when we have our heads down and focus on the immediate.
- But Paul warns us, ‘If you’re serious about living this new resurrection life with Christ, act like it’ (Colossians 3: 1 *The Message*).
- Jesus calls us to **look up!** To look to him and find our purpose and direction, to see things from his perspective.
- Seeing with God’s perspective, we can then **look in** at our own lives and see where God needs to rule. Which aspects of our lives, our thoughts, dreams and achievements, are seen through our human eyes and what might these look like through God’s lens?
- Once we find our purpose and direction, once we see those areas of our lives which need to be in Christ, we can **look out** and see how to live this new life ‘on earth as it is in heaven’.
- Then we can begin to ‘be alert to what is going on around Christ - that’s where the action is’ (Colossians 3:2 *The Message*).



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**Response time: possible song to use**

‘Where are you now  
When all I feel is doubt?  
Oh, where are you now  
When I can’t figure it out?  
I hear you say,  
“Look up, child.”’

(‘[Look Up, Child](#)’ by Lauren Daigle)

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