

Coming in First Place – the preeminence of Jesus Christ

“... so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything”(Colossians 1:18).

Coming in First Place – The Book of Colossians The Primacy of the Gospel of Jesus Christ (1:1-23) The Person of the Gospel - Colossians 1:15-20 (Part 3)

15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. 16 For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities — all things have been created through Him and for Him. 17 He is before all things, and in Him all things hold together. 18 He is also head of the body, the church; and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything. 19 For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him, 20 and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

It is said that when Leonardo da Vinci was about to depict the face of Christ in his fresco of the Last Supper that he first prepared himself with a time of prayer and meditation. Yet, even as he lifted his brush to give expression to all that had been on his heart, his hand trembled. Oh, that our contemplation of Christ would be so high and so grand that at times all we can do is tremble before Him.

In a similar vein, the poet Robert Browning in a letter that he wrote, recounted how some men of genius had been discussing various questions of philosophy. One of the men asked the question of the others how they would feel if some of the greatest of the dead were to suddenly appear in flesh and blood once more before them. After some discussion, this first man then asked, “And if Christ entered this room?” And he answered his own question by saying, “You see if Shakespeare entered we should all rise; yet if HE [Christ] appeared, we must kneel.”

Let me remind you of this statement that has served as a catalyst for our current passage of study; *what comes into our minds when we think about Christ is the most important thing about us.* Nothing is more important, more critical or more crucial to the well-being of our souls and indeed our very lives than entertaining high views of our Lord Jesus Christ. Do you really want to be a better spouse, a better parent, a better worker, a more obedient child? Do you desire to be more effective in talking to others about Christ; of being more involved in the lives of these with whom you worship with week in and week out; or more simply put, being one whose light for Christ shine more brightly? The answer is not hard, we must be entertaining higher views of Christ. We must come to know Him better and better. We need to read the Book; the Old Testament to see His power and majesty; the Gospels to see His character as He walked this earth; the New Testament letters to gain insight into how His character is to be lived out in our lives. We need, indeed we must know more about Christ. For let me remind you as well that nearly every error both within the church and without the church stems from having a diminished or defective view of the person and work of Christ.

Over the past couple of weeks we have been looking at Colossians 1:15-20, these verses that have been called the “Hymn of Christ” – words put here in this letter by the Apostle Paul, words that might well have been a part of an ancient hymn text of the church, perhaps written many years before Paul wrote this letter; words that are placed here to accomplish one purpose – to graphically depict for the Colossians and for the church of all generations the absolute

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supremacy; the wondrous wonder; the awesome attributes; the glorious splendor; and the perfection of humanity and of Deity all wrapped up in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Before us are some of the highest views of Christ offered for our consideration.

We have already noted from Colossians 1:15-17 how Jesus Christ is shown to be supreme and preeminent over all creation. He is the image, the visible manifestation, of the invisible God. As we consider the life of Christ as recorded in the Gospels and expounded upon in the rest of the New Testament, we are blessed with seeing the character and heart of God. If you want to know what God is like, we have no other place to go except to the life of Christ. For Jesus Himself said in John 14:9, **"He who has seen Me has seen the Father..."** In fact, there is no other way to see or know the Father, for it is Jesus who also said just a few verses before, **"I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but through Me."** Oh, that it would be our passion to know the Father by knowing Jesus more and more. Do not be content with a superficial knowledge of Christ. How long do marriages last or how happy are such marriages when one or more of the spouses expresses no interest, no desire, and no passion to know any more about the other beyond the fact that on a certain date they were legally married? May our prayer be that of the Apostle Paul, who even after many years of faithfully walking with Christ uttered this cry from Philippians 3:8 and 10

More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ...10 that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death...

May it be our prayer to know God by knowing Jesus Christ, He who is the image of God, the exact representation of God in human form. And how do we know that Jesus is indeed God, this visible manifestation of the power of God. Because He is the Creator, so says the text, the **"firstborn of creation"** meaning before and above as the preeminent one over creation because according to verse 16 He created it all and according to verse 17 He sustains it all.

This brought us to verse 18 and to the realization that Jesus is not simple supreme over creation, but also over the new creation, those whom He has saved; those whom He has redeemed from the power and penalty of sin as well as gives us the sure hope that when He comes again we will also be saved from the very presence of sin. And these whom Jesus gathers to Himself are called the Church, the called out ones, the body of Christ. And of this body, Jesus is the head, the founder, leader, director, provider and sustainer of all who by faith are connected to Him who is the head. We noted that to be vitally connected to Jesus Christ implies a vital connection to the church. We are as much bound to one another as the body of Christ as we are to Christ who is the head of the body. In fact, in Spurgeon's Morning and Evening this past week, he mentioned this very truth:

Do we not become members of the body of the divine person of Christ, Yes, the same blood which flows in the head flows in the hand and the same life which quickens Christ quickens His people, for "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God."

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And all of this has led up to the grand theme of this letter to the Colossians; indeed the grand theme that is to govern the lives of every believer, that according to verse 18, **“that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.”** Is that too lofty a goal? Is it too inconceivable that our lives, we who are the body of Christ, the church of Christ, might demonstrate more and more the supremacy of Christ in everything? Is this too difficult? Is it beyond our capacities? Well, in fact, it is beyond ours, but what is impossible for men is easy for God. As we entertain higher views of Christ; as we seek to know Him more, we will invariably see Him coming to have first place in everything. The unbelieving world needs to see this in us; for if Christ is not first and everything to us, why would they ever sense a need to come to Him. If the glory of Christ and the glory of His church are not of first importance to us, why would anyone want to be a part of Him or the church?

And this brings us then to three final thoughts concerning our pursuit of a high view of Christ. Since Christ is the head of the body, the church, then there are three things every believer needs to know and make known. We have three reasons as to why Jesus Christ is the head of the church, why He is so supreme that His followers would willingly forsake everything, counting all things as rubbish, simply to have Him come to have first place in everything. Those three reasons are...

1. His resurrection
2. His rank
3. His work of reconciliation

Jesus is head of the church, supreme over both the new creation as well as creation itself because He is the firstborn from the dead; because all the fullness of God dwells in Him and because by His blood He has made peace between God and those who believe in Him by faith. Let us spend the rest of our time this morning fleshing this out a bit more and answer the question, “Why is Christ to be regarded with such supremacy in both the church as well as over all creation?”

1. His resurrection (1:18b)

and He is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, so that He Himself will come to have first place in everything.

The first reason why Jesus is to be seen and treated in our lives as supreme is because of His resurrection. After identifying Jesus as supreme over the church, we are next given in verse 18 two more titles of Jesus that speak to us of why He is supreme. First, He is called **“the beginning.”** Jesus is the head of the church because He is the **“beginning”** of the church. It is Jesus who brought the church into existence. In Matthew 16:18 Jesus says that **“He will build His church...”** that at that time the community of believers who are **“in Christ”** had not yet been established. The church itself would begin at Pentecost as described in Acts 2. Jesus is the start, the beginning, the very source of the Church. Anything that robs or diminishes that is an affront to the Savior. What Paul says here is similar to what we read in Revelation 22:13 where Jesus said, **“I am the Alpha and the Omega”** the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet and then **“the first and the last, the beginning and the end.”** The word “beginning” in Revelation 22:13 is the same word for beginning in our Colossians text, *“arche”* in the Greek and it speaks of

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the source, the author, the cause. So, just as Jesus was the cause of creation, Jesus is also the cause of the church. This makes Jesus supreme over the church.

The second title given that somewhat explains why Jesus is the beginning of the church as well as supreme is that He is the **“firstborn from the dead”** – a reference to His resurrection. Remember that we noted a couple of weeks ago that the word firstborn can speak of priority in time, but also and more often it speaks of preeminence in position. The reason why Jesus is to be seen as supreme is because He is the preeminent, most glorious one come back from the dead. Remember that Jesus was not the first to be resurrected from the dead. Many before Christ had been resurrected from the dead in both the Old Testament as well as in the New Testament. Just about a week before Jesus’ resurrection you might recall that Lazarus was raised from the dead by Jesus. So what is meant by this phrase, **“firstborn from the dead”**? Beloved, Jesus is the first one to be raised from the dead never to die again. Think about that. Jesus rose from the dead, ascended into heaven and lives today! Jesus is the first to be raised from the dead to receive a glorified body. [Jesus is the first of a type of resurrection, what the Scriptures call the “first resurrection” – Matthew 28; 1 Thessalonians 4:17; Revelation 20:6]. And the point is this, that Jesus is first in rank or supremacy over all who will be raised to life never to die again because of their faith in Him. Because Jesus was raised from the dead to newness of life (Romans 6), we can rest assured that we will be raised from the dead in newness of life, clothed with immortality so that we might, like Jesus, forever dwell in the presence of God. Jesus is supreme over the church because He established for us by His resurrection a new order, those who would be raised like Him.

Romans 6:4-5

4 Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, so that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life. 5 For if we have become united with Him [connected with Him who is now our head] in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall also be in the likeness of His resurrection...

There is so much that could be said about this, but lets move on and note the reason why Jesus is given the titles of **“beginning, and firstborn from the dead”** as well as the image of the invisible God and Creator/Sustainer of all things... **“so that He Himself [emphatic] will come to have first place in everything.”** Beloved, this is the definition of supremacy, that Jesus Christ is primary in everything, in all our thoughts, all our actions, all our hopes and all our desires. Paul has shown his readers why Jesus is supreme over creation and now why He is supreme over the church. Being God, He has and is to be shown as having preeminence over all things. How are we doing? How are you doing?

How can we demonstrate that Christ has come to have first place in everything in our own lives? I believe the answer lies in our pursuit of living like Christ, of living sanctified or holy lives before God and others. How are we to live as Christians? Are we simply to make professions of Christianity, but live like everyone else in the world? We know that is not right. We are to live with the reality that He who has conquered death on our behalf is the one unto whom I am living. This affects the value we place on the things of the world; it affects our morals and ethics; it affects the way we use our time. We can ask ourselves, “what are we putting before our relationship to Christ [pause]; or before our relationship to the living organism He placed us in, the church”? It

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affects how we make decisions in life. The resurrection of Christ – because He lives, we live and ought to live in the likeness of Him, demonstrating Him to be our head, our beginning and our hope of eternal life.

2. His rank (1:19)

For it was the Father's good pleasure for all the fullness to dwell in Him,

The next two reasons given as to why Jesus is supreme apply to Jesus being over both creation and the church. Verses 19-20 sum up the reasons for Christ's supremacy. Verse 19 begins with, “**it was the Father's good pleasure...**” This is followed by two things that please the Father, the first, “**for all the fullness to dwell in Him [Jesus]**” and second, “**and through Him [Jesus] to reconcile all things to Himself...**” The first description calls to attention Jesus' rank or His position as God in the flesh.

I know we are often accustomed to speaking of Jesus as God, but this was truly a difficult teaching, first for the ones who saw Jesus walk upon this earth. Jesus was constantly making statements of His equality with the Father as God before the religious leaders and they constantly wanted to kill Him for what they considered blasphemy. In John 10:30-33 we read the following account with Jesus saying,

30 “I and the Father are one.” 31 The Jews picked up stones again to stone Him. 32 Jesus answered them, “I showed you many good works from the Father; for which of them are you stoning Me?” 33 The Jews answered Him, “For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy; and because You, being a man [no problem with his humanity, and even being a good man doing good works], make Yourself out to be God.”

The religious leaders had a problem with Jesus being God in the flesh. The false teachers at Colosse had a hard time with Jesus being God in the flesh. And even today there is a difficulty with understanding this. Yet Paul is emphatic. In Colossians 2:9 Paul writes, “**For in Him [Jesus] all the fullness of Deity dwells in bodily form.**” The miracle is not whether Jesus was God, for Jesus had always been God and with God from the beginning. The true miracle, that which makes Jesus so truly unique is that He became God in a human body. Colossians 1:19 and 2:9 forcefully remind us that all that makes God God was and is contained in the body of Jesus Christ. It was the Father's good pleasure that the second person of the Trinity, the Son of God, would be born into the human race and forever united perfect deity with perfect humanity so as to save to Himself a people who would forever worship Him.

Jesus is supreme because He is the image of the invisible God, the visible manifestation of Him who had been previously unknown in this way because the fullness of God dwells in Him. This is yet another reason why Jesus is to have first place in everything, He is God, indeed God in the flesh. This is His rank, this is His position and it ought to cause us to think about all that we do in light of who He is.

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3. His work of reconciliation

and through Him to reconcile all things to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross; through Him, I say, whether things on earth or things in heaven.

The final reason given as to why Jesus is supreme over both creation and the church is because of His work of reconciliation. Remember that this is also part of the Father's good pleasure, that **“through Him”** all things would be reconciled **“to Himself, having made peace through the blood of His cross.”**

What is this work of reconciliation? You are more familiar with it than you might realize. If you keep a checkbook then you reconcile that account monthly with your computer program or a calculator making sure that what you think you have is what the bank also says you have. And what happens when those do not match up? Well, at my house there is chaos. There is no peace until I find out the reason why, but as soon as that account is reconciled, there is a sense of relief and a sense of peace.

This is the idea behind Christ's work of reconciliation. Jesus is to bring all things into their proper or balanced place with regard to their relationship to Him. For those who have trusted in His sacrifice on the cross, our reconciliation will be fully realized when we stand before the Father's throne accepted...in our Beloved. For those who have refused Christ and disobeyed Him, these will be reconciled by their just punishment in hell and the lake of fire. And for creation itself, a creation that was subject to the destructive effects of sin, even creation will be restored as Jesus will reign on this earth for a 1000 years in perfect government.

You might notice that our text does not tell us yet why we or creation needs to be reconciled. This will be introduced in the next verses. All we are told here is that our being reconciled to God, our having peace with God came at the cost of Jesus enduring the wrath of God on the cross. Our peace with God was established and made possible by the blood of Christ. The author of Hebrews would say in 9:22, **“without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness [of sin].”** We are also told in the book of Hebrews that Jesus offered Himself once for all time for our sins (Hebrews 10:14). If we are to be reconciled to God, we need the sacrifice of Christ and must believe that the sacrifice of Christ on the cross was made for us? Do you believe that? That is the only thing that allows you to submit to Christ as your head in the church and thank Him for being your source and example of resurrection. That is the only thing that allows you to see and know Jesus as the image of the invisible God.

The death of Christ on the cross paid the price of sin for all who would believe and provided the justice needed for Jesus to come again to take back this earth that was usurped by sin and Satan and bring peace to it for the glory of God. You see again at the end of verse 20 that all things will be reconciled, brought to their proper place because of the work of Christ. According to Philippians 1:10-11 there will be a time when every knee will bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. This does not mean that everyone who bows will be saved, it simply means that everything will be reconciled, brought into right balance and that both the saved and the unsaved, the blessed and the cursed will all rightly acknowledge Jesus as Lord of all and Him who is supreme.

Jesus is supreme over creation and the new creation. Everyone will bow. The question for some is simply this, have you ever bowed before Him? What keeps you from bowing before Him as the one who provided for you everything you need for eternal life, who paid the price for

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your sin and who promises that if you come to Him, He will not cast you out, but will rather change your heart to know and love Him.

Let those of us who do know His love and sacrifice to continue to bow before Him and to praise Him as supreme over creation, supreme over the church as supreme in our lives, thanking Him for His resurrection from the death, His rank as God in the flesh and for His work of reconciliation, making peace between us and the Father all for His glory and honor.

Soli Deo Gloria

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